

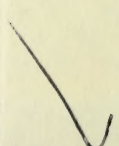




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THE JOHN P. BRANCH  
HISTORICAL PAPERS

OF  
RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE  
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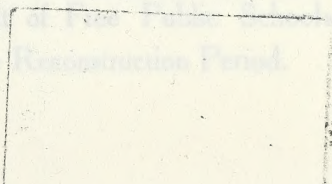
CONTENTS

PREFACE	- - - - -	3
THOMAS RODERICK DEW—D. RALPH MIDYETTE, JR.		5
WILLIAM HENERY BRODNAX—H. F. TURNER	-	14
NATHANIEL MACON CORRESPONDENCE	- - -	27

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THE JOHN P. BRANCH  
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JUNE, 1909

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Preface

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THE Branch Papers for 1909 consist of short biographies of Thomas R. Dew and W. H. Brodnax and the remaining available letters of Nathaniel Macon, of North Carolina. The letters were collected and edited by my predecessor in the Vaughan Chair of History of Randolph-Macon College, Professor W. E. Dodd, now of Chicago University. The biographies were also written under his direction. 1676156

The Branch Papers for 1910 will contain biographies of Edmund Ruffin and General Robert B. Taylor and an account of the work of Dr. William Henry Ruffner, in establishing free public schools in Virginia. The biography of General Taylor will bring out the leading events in the life of a Virginia Federalist who played a prominent part in local politics from 1798 to 1832. The biography of Ruffin will trace the development of the pro-slavery sentiment on the part of Virginia's industrial population from 1830 to 1861, and the war record and tragic death of a soldier devoted to the cause of the Confederacy. The paper on the Establishment of Free Public Schools in Virginia will deal mainly with the Reconstruction Period.





the United States his equal in scholarship, especially in the subjects which he taught.

When we consider the idea of a man holding a collegiate chair with such a list of departments, to each of which he was required to devote at least three lectures a week, we stand amazed. Add to this the fact that he was engaged in writing voluminous essays and treatises which required and have shown great care and research in their preparation, besides a large number of newspaper and magazine articles, and the necessarily large correspondence incumbent upon a "savant," we must admit that "verily there were giants in those days."

As noted above, William and Mary, prior to the opening of the nineteenth century, had been the foremost college in America, south of Boston, but the attendance had been greatly reduced previous to its being taken in charge by Professor Dew. For this there were several reasons. Already the North and the South had become divided upon political questions, and were distinct political divisions, and the attendance at schools followed the line thus drawn, so that William and Mary now got its students entirely from the South and not many Southern students went North. Moreover the climate at Williamsburg was not very healthy. The location had become out of the way and undesirable. Repeated attempts had been made to have the college moved to Richmond, and finally, as the natural offspring of William and Mary there came the establishment of the University of Virginia in 1819.

In 1836, when Dew succeeded Dr. Empie as president of the college, a new era was inaugurated, and a golden period it was for the college. In the first three years of his presidency the roll was almost doubled. To quote a literary contemporary of Dew's,<sup>2</sup> "his amiable disposition, fine talents, tact at management, great zeal and unwearied assiduity were the means of

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<sup>2</sup>Meade's Old Churches.



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raising the college to as great prosperity as had ever been its lot, notwithstanding many opposing difficulties."

The Law Course was improved and enlarged, and now numbered thirty students. From 1779 to 1826 it had been presided over by George Wythe and St. George Tucker, both eminent statesmen and scholars. But probably no course was more exhaustive, or its teacher more thoroughly grounded in his subject than that of History and Political Economy, taught by Dew from 1827 until his death in 1846. His course in History was the most thorough and comprehensive of any in America at that time.

It has been said that in the North men gave the care of the State to professional politicians, while in the South, the ordinary work being done by slaves, the white people had time for study and make practical use of their studies in politics, preferring themselves to become the statesmen of their day. This is undoubtedly true, and probably no one in the entire South did more to stimulate the growth of this interest and personal activity than did Dew. He was among the first teachers of Political Economy in the South. Familiar with the best results of French, German, and English scholarship in the field of classical history, he taught his students to see analogous parallels between ancient history and politics, and that of our own State and nation. In the study of such subjects the South was far ahead of the North, where they were not taken up until after the Civil War, and this accounted in large measure for the conspicuous merit and superiority of Southern leaders in political life.

In Dew's class in Political Economy Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was used as a text-book. Being a close disciple of this great economist, Dew was naturally a firm adherent to the policy of Free Trade. In the United States the two great parties were then, as now, divided on the subject of tariffs. Thus Dew—to use his own words—"convinced of the error and impolicy of the Restrictive System, and having seen the excite-





ment which it had occasioned, and hoping that a calm and dispassionate view of the subject would be of some profit," published in 1829 his treatise on the "Restrictive System." This was in the form of lectures which were written for, and delivered to, his senior class in political science. However unprejudiced and non-partisan Dew announces himself to be, and no doubt aimed to be, one readily sees that it is an attack upon the Restrictive System, and that its author was a radical Anti-Tariff man. The argument is logical and forcible. He combined theoretical and practical views, and aimed to make the treatise fair and unprejudiced, "being convinced that it is the great duty of the Professor to inculcate upon the mind of the student those general principles alone, which will form the basis of his future opinions and actions."

To Dew politics was something eminently practical, and he expresses this clearly in closing this treatise, urging that it is the duty of every American citizen, especially of such as enjoy the privileges of education, to prepare himself for the part which may devolve upon him, "and a laudable ambition should make you look to yourselves as the philosophers and statesmen of other days."

This treatise, although written for his class, was widely read, particularly throughout the South, where it coincided with the political views of most voters. In the North it was also well received. Its logic was irresistible and conclusive, and it is believed to have exerted a great influence in the remodeling of the tariff laws in 1832.

Another large work of Dew's was a "Digest of the Laws, Customs, Manners, and Institutions of the Ancient and Modern Nations." This also was written for his classes in the History Department. It was printed and used in his classes, but was not published until after his death. It has no pretensions of originality, but has decided advantages over most historical compilations of the time. This was also written in the lecture style and is, rather than an enumeration of facts and events,





a digest of the subjects named in the title. Its topical method of treatment and the life which the author has infused into it, make it very interesting and agreeable reading. Being suggestive of parallels between ancient and modern history and politics, it was a practical application of the lessons of past history to the needs of the American youth.

Primarily Dew was a teacher, but this did not prevent him from taking an active part in the political life of his day. We have already noted his influence in regard to the tariff, but far more than this was his influence upon the question of slavery. The evil of the institution had long been recognized, both in the North and in the South; in fact, there had never been a time when it was not bitterly opposed. Thomas Jefferson had devoted a great part of his life in an effort to perfect some means whereby the slave system could be done away with. In Virginia such men as George Wythe, St. George Tucker, and John Randolph had done much to establish the spirit of philanthropy prevalent in Virginia before the onslaught of the Abolitionists.

Benjamin Lundy, the editor of an emancipation paper published in Baltimore, had done much in the interest of emancipation in the South. In 1829 there were several organizations in the South founded upon a moral dissatisfaction with slavery. However, with the abuses and incriminations of Garrison, who had taken charge and turned the direction of Lundy's paper, the whole tide set in and the benefits of slavery, socially, politically, and economically were preached in Virginia by Dew, and in South Carolina by William Gillmore Simms. Simms edited a volume, "The Pro-Slavery Argument," in which Prof. Dew, Chancellor Harper and ex-Gov. Hammond, of South Carolina, were his fellow contributors. Simms argued the "divine right" of slavery; Dew, the economic and social benefits.

In this argument Dew showed that it was to Virginia's advantage to raise slaves, and that trade in slaves had been one





of Virginia's chief sources of wealth and profit. Dew propounds two questions: "Can these two distinct races of people now living together as master and servant, be ever separated?" and, "Will the day ever arrive when the black can be liberated from his thralldom and mount upward in the scale of civilization and rights to an equality with the white?" With an argument full of illustrations and deductions from law and history he essays that such a consummation would be both undesirable and impossible. That Dew's sense of justice was hidden by his interest in his State, or at least in the white population of it, is shown in the conclusion: "There is a slave property of the value of \$100,000,000 in Virginia, and it matters but little how you destroy it, when it is gone the deed is done and Virginia will be a desert."

In August, 1830, there had occurred the slave insurrection in Southampton county, Virginia. Over fifty persons had been killed before it was put down by an armed force. The insurrection produced a strong movement of the public mind in the State and elsewhere. When the Legislature met in December, 1831, it was evident that the question of negroes, both slaves and freedmen, would be the principal subject for deliberation before this body. During the session letters and petitions were received from nearly every county in the State, from Quaker societies and other philanthropic organizations. Various bills and measures were proposed, and the discussion of the slave question was taken up day after day. At this time there appeared in the Richmond newspapers an argument in favor of slavery by Dew. This also appeared in the *American Quarterly Review*, and was no doubt widely read.

Whatever effect other influences might have had, we know that Dew's argument was convincing and effectual, so that, instead of emancipating the negro, the Legislature passed stringent laws against the slaves, free negroes and mulattoes, forbidding them to hold public meetings, prescribing their education, and imposing other restrictions which now



seem pitiable and entirely incompatible with a correct sense of moral justice.

In this argument Dew discussed the origin of slavery, its advantages, the various proposed plans for abolition, and finally its injustice and evils. The origin of slavery he attributed to be due to four causes, viz., the laws of war, the state of property and feebleness of government, bargain and sale, and crime. In setting forth the advantages of slavery and its aid in civilizing the world, he showed that it had been the only means of mitigating the horrors of savage warfare. Again, it had conquered the sloth and listlessness of the savage and inured him to regular industry. He illustrates this point by the fact that the only Indian tribe in America who had advanced greatly in civilization had possessed negro slaves. Moreover, as household servants, they relieved woman of all the drudgery and thus raised her in dignity and position. As for abolition, he considered that there could be but two real plans: emancipation with deportation, and emancipation without deportation. He proves the first impracticable, the second impossible.

Dew allows that slavery is wrong in the abstract and is contrary to the spirit of Christianity, but he says that if we cannot be rid of one evil without perpetrating another, then the law of God and man forbid us action. In answer to Jefferson's charge that slavery produces deleterious moral effects, he points to the sound population of Virginia and the chivalry of the South. With the illustrations of Sparta, Thebes, Athens, Rome, and Poland, he shows that the history of the world does not prove slavery to be inconsistent or unfavorable to a republican state. Where there are black slaves the whites are equal, and this is the very essence of republicanism. He shows that there is but slight insecurity arising from the possibility of slave uprisings. He admits that under favorable conditions free labor is the best, but where love of idleness prevails slave labor is consequently the better. Our free ne-





groes, the Indians, the Russian serfs, the Haytians, and others will not work except when compelled.

To those who pointed out that Virginia and the South were not keeping pace with northern and new western States, he argued, like the staunch free-trader that he was, that the conditions were due not to slavery, but to the fact that the Revolution had destroyed the South's agricultural market, and that high tariff, and that alone, had restricted the growth of the South.

Of course no one to-day defends slavery, and its injustice and inhumanity is readily apparent to every thinking person, but we find it hard to criticise or condemn this man whose philanthropy was overruled by his interest in the State. It was natural that Dew should defend slavery; his education and environment had inculcated in him a firm belief in its advantages. Familiar with classic history, he looked back upon the splendor and magnificence of Rome and Greece, and he hoped to see slavery build up America even as it had built them up. To him the Roman State was ideal, the elevated condition of woman, the men, with slaves doing their work, devoting themselves to education, to art, to philosophy, and to statesmanship.

However much Dew might have otherwise been interested in politics, we know that President Jackson consulted him in regard to the Bank Bill. He appears to have had considerable influence with Jackson, and has been called a member of the famous "Kitchen Cabinet."

Notwithstanding his great interest and activity in the affairs of the State, his great work was done in his daily life as a teacher. He was the greatest president of a college which was a maker of statesmen, a college which produced four Presidents of the United States, seventeen governors, as many senators, and nearly forty judges, not to mention a goodly number of congressmen, cabinet officers, professors, etc. He was to William and Mary what Prof. Cooper was to the College of South Carolina—a teacher whose doctrines entered into the life of





the Southern people. His whole soul was wrapped up in his college, and his research into the theory of government and the great principles of political economy has made his influence felt in the history of our State.

In the summer of the year 1846 he traveled abroad for the second time. For many years his constitution had been gradually undermined by consumption, and a damp, chilling ocean voyage accelerated its ravages. On the fifth day of August, as we learn from the Paris correspondent of the Charleston Courier, he arrived in Paris accompanied by his wife, and here he died the next day. On account of the nature of the disease he was buried the day following his death, and Paris still holds the body of this great educator, a philosopher, one of the first literary men of the day, a distinguished political writer and an able essayist. In his home life Dew was of a quiet, kind and unassuming disposition, which, with his exquisite literary taste and brilliant talents, made him much respected and beloved.

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## GENERAL WILLIAM HENERY BRODNAX.

By H. F. TURNER, A. B.

General William Henery Brodnax was born in Brunswick county, Virginia, 1786. He was the son of William Brodnax,<sup>1</sup> a lawyer practicing in Brunswick county.<sup>2</sup> Of General Brodnax's boyhood we know nothing; but if we may be allowed to judge what the boy had been from what the man was, he must have been a whole-hearted boy, one who did not spend his time in idle dreaming, but one ever ready for action; a leader among his companions.

He was tall, handsome, and commanding; a congenial companion, a true friend, and a kind and loving husband and father. He was a gifted orator, quick-witted and good in repartee. His language was flowing and his words well chosen. His arguments were clear-cut and to the point, convincing his hearers of the truth of his statements, and of the sincerity of the man behind the statement.

In the later years of his life General Brodnax was in very poor health, and often spoke under physical difficulties. Yet when the occasion demanded his services he paid as little heed as possible to his feelings. In 1832 when he rose in the Virginia Assembly, to speak on the subject of Federal Relations, he said that he was suffering with his throat and a continuous fever, but added that, even if he knew that it would be his last effort, he would use what strength he had to try to persuade his associates to adopt measures to safeguard our liberties.<sup>3</sup>

General Brodnax, though a Whig, was a staunch supporter of the doctrine of States Rights. He believed that any State had a perfect right to secede from the Union as a remedy for

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<sup>1</sup>William and Mary College Quarterly—XIV; 138.

<sup>2</sup>Order Book of Brunswick County Courts; Aug. 25, 1788.

<sup>3</sup>Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 29, 1833.





oppression. But he thought it would be a serious act, and one to be used as a last resort only.

Brodnax was a member of the Episcopal Church. In his religious life he was zealous and consistent, and carried with him the same earnestness that characterized him in all he undertook. His religion was not for special occasions, but he carried it into all his walks in life. On reading his letters, one is impressed with his piety which can be seen in every letter written by him. He wrote like one whose confidence in the goodness of God was unassailable.

General Brodnax in all probability attended Hampden-Sidney College. In 1830 he received from that institution the honorary M. A. He studied law in Petersburg, Virginia, under Sterling Ruffin. General Winfield Scott, of Virginia, and Judge Thomas Roan Ruffin, of North Carolina, were his fellow students. Brodnax at first located in Greenville county, but later he moved to Dinwiddie, purchasing that famous country seat, Kingston. He practiced law in the counties of Brunswick and Greenville, and in the city of Petersburg. He was a successful lawyer, and secured a large and lucrative practice.<sup>4</sup>

He married Miss Elizabeth Withers, a woman of rare culture. They had born to them four sons and two daughters, all of whom outlived their father.

In 1818 he was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates from Greenville county.<sup>5</sup> He served one term, but did not return the next year. Nor did he return to that body until 1830, and then from Dinwiddie county. However, he was urged by his friends to accept the nomination for the office. In a letter in reply to a letter from Hon. J. C. Cabell, urging him to accept the nomination for another term, he said: "You ask me if I could not serve *one* session? I have thought much on the subject, for I distrusted the conclusions of my own judgment when they appeared to conflict with the opinions of many of my

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<sup>4</sup>William and Mary College Quarterly—Vol. XIV; 57-58.

<sup>5</sup>Journals of the House; 1818-1819.



friends (including especially yourself), who, I know could only wish me well. But although my inclinations and my feelings very powerfully prompt me to return to that body from the hope that I might be of some small service to a cause that has my warmest wishes; yet my judgment remains unchanged. One session under existing circumstances would throw me back for years."<sup>6</sup>

General Brodnax was appointed Brigadier-General of the militia by the Legislature of Virginia in 1824, which office he filled, with credit, for the rest of his life.<sup>7</sup>

When Lafayette visited Virginia in 1824, the Legislature sent General Brodnax to Baltimore to meet him and escort him to Virginia. Brodnax was Chief Marshal at the celebration at Yorktown given in honor of Lafayette,<sup>8</sup> and Lafayette was a guest in the home of General Brodnax, and rode, at Yorktown, his favorite horse, named Fergus, an animal of remarkable style and beauty.

General Brodnax was one of the presidential electors at the time Jackson was elected in 1828<sup>9</sup>

He was a member of the Constitutional Convention which met in Richmond, October 5, 1829-January 15, 1830. He served on many of the most important committees, and took an active part in the discussions of the convention. He strongly opposed the motion to put all the judges out of office and to elect a new bench. In his speech opposing this motion he said, in part: "Sir, this scheme of shoving in one group all your judges 'by the board' without crime on their part, without even the imputation of an offense appears to me not only *unjust* to them as individuals, but impolitic in us as statesmen, from its inevitable tendency to invade the Judiciary, and a dangerous precedent to future time." In speaking further he said: "Its injustice to

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<sup>6</sup>Letter to Hon. J. C. Cabell, owned by Dr. John Brodnax, Manchester, Va.

<sup>7</sup>Richmond Whig. Jan. 27, 1824.

<sup>8</sup>William and Mary College Quarterly, Vol. XIV; 57-58.

<sup>9</sup>William and Mary College Quarterly; XIV: 57-58.





the present incumbents results from a palpable violation of an expressed contract between themselves and the government.”

On the next point he said: “Has not this provision a direct tendency to invade the Judiciary—not only now but for all future time . . . In the very outset of the plan every judge in the State is to be dismissed, with permission, however to be re-elected *if he can*; yes sir, *if he can*. That is, if he can command interest or influence enough with the Legislature, to effect a favorable consideration of his pretensions.”<sup>10</sup>

As the basis of representation for the General Assembly, he favored the Federal Rule, which was to count free whites and three-fifth of the slaves, but he was willing to count only voters as a basis for representation in the Senate.<sup>11</sup>

This revision of the Constitution had been looked forward to with great interest, and the best men of the State were chosen for the work. Such men as ex-President James Madison, of Orange county, ex-President James Monroe, of Loudoun, Chief Justice John Marshall, of Richmond, John Randolph, of Charlotte, John Y. Mason, of Southampton, and other leading men of the State were associated with General Brodnax in the Convention.

The presence of such men as those named above shows something of the importance of the Convention. Mr. Philip P. Barbour, president of the Convention, after the resignation of Monroe, said in his closing address: “To be a member, even, of such an assembly as this imports a large and gratifying share of public confidence.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1830 General Brodnax was again elected to the House, this time from Dinwiddie county, and he was re-elected each year from this time to the year before his death.<sup>12</sup>

Brodnax commanded the troops of militia from Greenville and Brunswick counties during the Southampton Insurrection.

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<sup>10</sup>Debates of the Convention of 1829-1830.

<sup>11</sup>Debates of the Convention of 1829-1830.

<sup>12</sup>Journals of the House 1830-1831; 1831-1832; 1832-1833.



In 1831 Governor John Floyd in his annual message to the Assembly, spoke as follows of General Brodnax's services in putting down the insurrection: "Two regiments in Brunswick and Greenville were called into service by their commanding officers, under the law vesting them with power to do so for such purposes. These troops being under General William Henery Brodnax, that officer assumed command and did not leave the field until all danger had passed.

"It gives me great pleasure to commend to the General Assembly the high satisfaction I feel in bearing testimony to the zeal, promptitude and dispatch, with which every officer discharged his duty, and the cheerful alacrity with which every citizen obeyed the call of duty."<sup>13</sup>

The session of Legislature for the years 1831-1832 proved one of unusual interest. The Southampton Insurrection, mentioned in the Governor's Message quoted above, led by a slave, Nat Turner, had resulted in the butchering of a number of innocent persons; mostly women and children. This had caused a wave of alarm to sweep over the entire State, and the people were looking to the Legislature for the adoption of some measure which would prevent the occurrence of any similar tragedy in the future. The governor in his message to the General Assembly advised that something be done towards the solution of the slave question. And scarcely had the Legislature assembled before petitions and memorials began to pour in from all parts of the State requesting that some step be taken towards the abolition of slavery.<sup>14</sup>

General Brodnax was chairman of the committee to consider these petitions and memorials and to report to the House by bill or otherwise. But before the committee had seen fit to report, Mr. Goode, of Mecklenburg county, offered a resolution as follows:

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<sup>13</sup>Governor's Message, Journals of the House 1831-1832.

<sup>14</sup>Journals of the House 1831-1832.





"Resolved, That the select committee raised on the subject of slaves, and free negroes, and the melancholy occurrence growing out of the tragic massacre of Southampton, be discharged from the consideration of all petitions, memorials and resolutions, which have as their object the manumission of persons held in servitude under existing laws of this Commonwealth, and that it is not expedient to legislate on the subject."

Mr. Randolph, of Albemarle county immediately moved to amend Mr. Goode's resolution by striking out all following the word "Southampton" and inserting in its stead the following: "Be instructed to enquire into the expediency of submitting to the vote of the qualified voters in the several towns, cities, boroughs and counties of this Commonwealth the propriety of providing by law, that the children of all female slaves who may be born in this State on or after the fourth of July, 1840, shall become the property of the Commonwealth, the males at age of twenty-one years and females at age of eighteen. If detained by owners within the limits of Virginia until they have respectively arrived at the ages aforesaid; to be hired out until the net sum arising shall be sufficient to defray the expenses of their removal beyond the limits of the United States."<sup>15</sup>

Mr. Goode's resolution and Mr. Randolph's amendment were discussed in the House for several days. Meanwhile General Brodnax made the following report:

"The select committee to whom was referred certain memorials praying for the passage of some law providing for the gradual abolition of slavery in the Commonwealth, have according to order had the same under consideration and have come to the following resolution thereupon:

*"Resolved as the opinion of this committee, that it is inexpedient for the present Legislature to make any enactment for the abolition of slavery."*<sup>15</sup>

General Brodnax concurred in this report. Although he was in favor of some measure for the gradual abolition of slavery

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<sup>15</sup>Journals of the House 1831-1832.



he expressed his private opinion as being unfavorable to any legislative enactment favoring the emancipation of the slaves without the consent of their owners and a fair compensation for the property. And since a number of the western counties of the State contained but few slaves he knew that a popular vote of the citizens of the State would not be the expression of the slaveholders.

He considered the slaves as much property as houses and lands and thought that the slaveholder should be protected in his rights. This, however, did not blind him to the evils of the institution. He said of it: "*That slavery in Virginia is an evil, and a transcendent evil, would be idle and more than idle for any human being to doubt. It is a mildew which has blighted, in its course, everything that it has touched from the creation of the world.*"<sup>16</sup>

In speaking on the Mr. Goode's resolution and Mr. Randolph's amendment General Brodnax said that he regretted very much that Mr. Goode had brought the subject up, for he thought that it would have been much better to have waited for the committee's report before going into the discussion of the question. He said that he could not agree, either with Mr. Goode or Mr. Randolph. Quoting from his speech, he said: "The subject sir, has long been one, with me of anxious and painful reflection; and it is my misfortune to be unable entirely to concur with either of the extreme parties of this House; either with those who think that the existence of slavery is not an evil, or that nothing can or ought to be done to abate the evil, or to lessen its effects; and still less with those who propose as a remedy, a plan fraught in my judgment, with incalculable mischief; which would tear up by the roots all the ligaments that bind society together, subvert principles which have been consecrated by the wisdom of ages, and break down every barrier with which our constitution and laws have fenced the se-

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<sup>16</sup>General Brodnax's speech, *Richmond Enquirer*, Jan. 24, 1832.





curity of private property; for such is the light in which I am compelled to regard the motion of the gentleman from Albemarle (Mr. Randolph)."<sup>17</sup> He said that he would never agree to any scheme for the gradual diminution, or ultimate extermination of the black population of the State, unless the following principles, which he said that he had always regarded as axioms, were observed:

"1st. That no emancipation of slaves should be tolerated, unaccompanied by their immediate removal from among us.

"2nd. That no system should be introduced, which is calculated to interfere with, or weaken the security of private property or effect its value; and

"3rd. That not a single slave or any property he possesses should be taken from its owner *without his own consent*, or an ample compensation for it."<sup>18</sup>

The report of the committee, offered by General Brodnax, was adopted, with an amendment, in form of a preamble, proposed by Mr. Brice, of Goochland, which made the report read as follows; "Profoundly sensible of the great evils arising from the colored population of this Commonwealth; induced by humanity, as well as policy, to an immediate removal, in the first place as well of those who are now free as of such as shall hereafter become free; believing that this effort while it is in accordance with the sentiments of the country on the subject, will absorb all present means, and that a further action for the removal of slaves should await a more definite development of public opinion."<sup>19</sup>

General Brodnax objected to the amendment, for while he accorded with the reasons given, he thought that the amendment would embarrass the House.

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<sup>17</sup>General Brodnax's speech, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 24, 1832.

<sup>18</sup>General Brodnax's speech, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 24, 1832.

<sup>19</sup>Journals of the House, 1831-1832.



Several days later in the session General Brodnax introduced a bill which set forth his views on the subject. The Bill with some amendments passed the House by a vote of 79 to 41.<sup>20</sup> following is a summary of the bill as it passed:

"No free Negro shall be removed by force so long as there is a sufficient number who are willing to go to equal the means of transportation at any given time.

"If more than enough should volunteer, they shall be selected by age. First, men from 16 to 25 years of age and women from 14 to 23 years; as near an equal number of each sex as possible. Second, men from 25 to 45 with their wives and children, boys under 16 and girls under 14; and women from 23 to 40 with children, boys under 16 and girls under 14. And third, men from 45 to 50, and women from 40 to 45. Provided, in all cases, however, where parents of any age shall be sent their children boys under 16 and girls under 14 shall go with them. If at any time there should not be enough volunteers to use all the means in hand, a compulsory requisite shall be resorted to for the purpose of obtaining the required number. Selection shall be on the same principle as above, *Provided*, however, that no man above the age of 45 or woman over 40 shall be removed without his or her free consent.

Emigrants shall have, besides their transportation, money, or its equivalent, sufficient to give them a start in their new homes. Slaves emancipated by their owners shall be transported at first convenience, if provisions have been made by those emancipating them, for their transportation and temporary support. If no provision have been made they shall be hired out until the amount arising therefrom shall be sufficient for this purpose, and then transported. For the purpose of carrying these provisions into effect, the sum of \$100,000.00 shall be and is hereby appropriated for the year 1833 and \$200,000.00 for each

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<sup>20</sup>Journals of the House, 1831-1832.





year hereafter. If at the end of any year there should be a surplus it shall go over to the next year."<sup>21</sup>

This bill, though it passed the House with a good majority, did not meet with favor in the Senate, and was amended until it was practically useless and finally tabled.<sup>22</sup>

General Brodnax was censured by some on account of the clause which called for the use of force in compelling the negroes to leave when there were not asufficient number who were willing to go. In reply to this he made a speech in the House defending the compulsory clause. He said if we intend to export the free negroes that it would be necessary sooner or later to resort to force, for the free negroes would not be as anxious to go as some thought. And as to the humanity of the case he said: "And on the score of humanity, I really think that all the humanity and mercy, connected with the question, are on my side of it—that those will be much more happily consulted by retaining the compulsory feature than by expunging it."<sup>23</sup>

General Brodnax was a member of The American Colonizing Society, which had as its purpose the colonizing of such free negroes as would consent to go to Liberia.

General Brodnax was re-elected to the House for the session 1832-1833. In this year South Carolina issued her Nullification Ordinance. And President Jackson in turn issued a proclamation threatening to resort to arms to enforce the laws of the Federal government. On December 13, 1832, Governor John Floyd laid before the General Assembly of Virginia a copy of the ordinance and a copy of the President's proclamation with a communication condemning any appeal to the sword, but recommending a National Convention as the remedy in a case like this where a large minority of the people solemnly protested.

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<sup>21</sup>Journals of the House, 1831-1832.

<sup>22</sup>Records of the Senate of Virginia 1831-1832.

<sup>23</sup>Richmond Enquirer, February 18, 1832.



The House appointed a select committee with General Brodnax as chairman to consider the Ordinance of Nullification the President's proclamation and the Governor's communication.

On December 20, the committee made a report denouncing both the Proclamation and the Nullification Ordinance. It appealed to the President to withhold the arm of force; to Congress to repeal the obnoxious tariff law; and to South Carolina, not to enforce her ordinance. It recommended that two commissioners be sent to South Carolina to present the remonstrances of Virginia. It requested the call of a convention of the States in case the revision of the tariff was not effected by the Congress, then in session. The resolution also set forth the view that a State had a right to secede as a constitutional remedy for oppression.<sup>24</sup>

The resolutions were discussed at length in the House and after numerous amendments were adopted. The substance of them as adopted is as follows:

1st. South Carolina is asked to rescind her Nullification Ordinance.

2d. Congress is asked to modify the offensive tariff bill.

3d. All States are asked to abstain from any and all acts calculated to destroy the peace of the country.

4th. That we continue to hold the doctrine of States Rights and States Sovereignty set forth in the resolutions of 1798.

5th. House and Senate are to jointly elect a commissioner to go to South Carolina and present the preamble and resolutions adopted by the Legislature of Virginia to the South Carolina Legislature.

6th. The Governor is requested to communicate the preamble and resolutions to our representatives and senators at Washington, and to the Governors of the other States.<sup>25</sup>

These resolutions were agreed to by the Senate, and Hon. B. W. Leigh was sent as a commissioner to South Carolina.

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<sup>24</sup>Tyler: Letters and Times of the Tylers. p 451.

<sup>25</sup>Journals of the House 1832-1833.





The clause in regards to States Rights was the center of discussion, for on this question rested practically the whole issue. General Brodnax stood firm for States Rights although he did not favor nullification. He said that he was no friend of nullification and that it was not to be found in the policy of Virginia. But he said that while disapproving South Carolina's methods he did not censure her as severely as some, for she was engaged in the same great cause as ourselves: "In resistance to unprincipled monopoly and unconstitutional usurpation." He said that sovereignty, in his opinion, rested in the people and not in the government. "It is the people who create both State and general government."

In speaking of secession he said: "To withdraw from the Union is a serious act . . . The seceding State, whatever might be its relative magnitude, would speedily and distinctly feel the loss of the aid and continuance of the Union." But admitting all this he believed that the reduction by military force of any State when she was struggling for what she considered "her great and vital rights" would be the death-knell of civil liberty in America.<sup>26</sup>

The session of 1832-1833 was his last year in the House. His health was declining and he was not physically able to fill the place.

He was invited to attend a banquet given in Petersburg, in honor of Hon. B. W. Leigh who, as we remember, was the commissioner to South Carolina, to offer the remonstrances of Virginia as to the Nullification Ordinance. General Brodnax was sick and unable to attend, so he sent a letter of regrets in which he praised Mr. Leigh very highly; calling him the bravest of the brave for the manner in which he had resisted the encroachments of President Jackson on the Constitution as interpreted by the South. Of President Jackson he said: "A President came to the office under the influence of numerous pledges

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<sup>26</sup>Speech of General Brodnax, *Richmond Enquirer*, beginning Jan. 24, 1833 and continuing Jan. 26-29-31-Feb. 2, 1833.



on subjects, some of them dear, all highly interesting to the people of Virginia, not one has escaped violation." He said that Jackson had done more to subvert many of the fundamental provisions of the Constitution than any other President.

This was in all probability his last letter, for he died only a few days after this, at his home, Kingston, October 23, 1834, leaving to his children the rich legacy of a life well spent in the service of his State, fighting for principles, though in some cases thought by his contemporaries too radical, but we, having the history of the time since his day to guide us in forming our conclusions, see where he was fareighted.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Richmond Whig, Oct. 24, 1834.



## MACON PAPERS.\*

27

The following letters of Nathaniel Macon, covering practically the whole of his political career, will add perhaps to our knowledge of the period. Other fragments of the Macon correspondence have appeared in recent years in the *American Historical Review*, Vol. VII, 100, 111; the *Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College*, Vol. I, No. 2; and the *James Sprunt Historical Monographs of the University of North Carolina*, Nos. 2 and 3. The present installment practically completes the Macon correspondence in so far as it is now known.

The publication of these letters in different places and forms is rather to be regretted, but it was unavoidable. The only remedy would be a completed edition in book form; but for this there seems not to be a sufficient demand.

I have not attempted the ungrateful task of "editing" except in such instances as seemed to call for notes of explanation. A most interesting letter from the standpoint of party politics is that of Duncan Cameron to John Moore of September, 1802; another which sheds some light upon the inner workings of the first Jefferson administration is that of Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson bearing the date of August 6, 1803.

WILLIAM E. DODD.

University of Chicago.

NATHANIEL MACON TO RODERIC BIGELOW.

Philadelphia 8 April '98

Last thursday I received of Mr Richard Smythe for you the certificate of Capt. William Parsons in support of the claim

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\*A remnant of an apparently rich collection of correspondence of Southern leaders now in the possession of Mrs. W. K. Martin, Richmond, Va.





of John Branham, on friday gave it to Mr Simmons the accountant in the war dept. for examination, and to settle the claim, and on Saturday the accountant sent me the enclosed letter, to which I must refer you for the situation of the claim. In my last to you, I told you that Mr. Smythe had declared, he could not find the paper, and I had really after his declaration, no expectation of obtaining it, and you will observe, that it is yet doubtful, whether it may finally be of any value, indeed without an adequate authority to receive the pay if any should  
(—— torn ——)

I have wrote you several times on the subject of the claim, and have never heard whether either of my letters had come to hand, nor are they of any consequence now: because the information given in this differs entirely from that contained in them—in haste—

I am sir yr. most obt svt,

NATHL MACON.

[Roderic Bigelow] near Warrenton.

N. B. You will keep the accounts, letter or a voucher for the deposit of the claim. N. M.

NATHANIEL MACON To RODERIC BIGELOW.

Philadelphia 17 May 1798

Sir

Yours of the 26 ultimo has been received. The order from Branham is not considered by the Comptroller of the treasury as sufficient authority for you to obtain the certificate that may be due for his services. Since my last to you, the accountant of the War Depart. and the Auditor have both examined the claim, and the latter has reported to the Comptroller that there is due to John Branham the sum of eighty one Dollars and seventy nine cents, with interest from the 16 day of November 1783. The report of the Auditor will not be acted on by the



Comptroller untill a personal application shall be made by Branham, or it is satisfactorily proved to him, that he is now living, and that he is the identical man that served, and the one to whom the certificate is due, in either case, I imagine he will admit the report of the Auditor, and order the debt to be registered in the name of John Branham, Agreeable to the act of the 27 of March 1792, which you can see at the clerks office of our county, or at our neighbor's Mr Dudley Clanton's, after the debt shall be registered it will then be necessary for you to get a power of attorney from Branham (unless he would personally attend at the treasury, to make on the books of the treasury a transfer of the certificate to you) to authorize you to have such transfer made. He is also entitled to land from the U. S. I most sincerely wish it was in my power to satisfy your inquiry as to the time of my leaving this place. But I cannot even now form any opinion when Congress will adjourn, and I will not voluntarily go before that event happens.

Had not Pollard have exhibited a claim for Branham's services under the before mentioned act, no settlement could now be made, because the statute of limitations would bar it. I enclose you duplicate of the accountants letter to me, the original of which was transmitted you some time since. I also enclose the form of a power of attorney for transferring the Registered debt. this probably you may want some time hence, this together with my former letters contain all the information that I possess on the subject of the claim For news I must beg leave to refer you to the paper herewith sent, as I really have not time to touch on politics — I am sir

Yr most obt. svt.

NATHL MACON.

Roderic Bigelow

near Warrenton.

N. B. after the Comptroller shall be satisfied that Branham





is now alive, and the soldier that served there [will] be no difficulty in obtaining the number and the date of the certificate, If I am here I can easily ——— or any other person may. N. M.

NATHANIEL MACON TO RODERIC BIGELOW.

Philadelphia 24 May 1798

Sir

Yours of the 15 instant has been received, all the information it requires, was transmitted to you a few days before it came to hand, except the price of tobacco, and the enclosed will give that. I got it from a merchant who is in the tobacco trade and have no doubt but it may be depended on, though the price at this place for that article is not so regular and constant as in some of the more southern towns, and our situation may render the price more precarious than common, because an act passed both houses of the Legislature yesterday, which in my opinion amounts to a declaration of war against the French Republic, and I have no doubt but the President will approve it early tomorrow, so that it will be a law as soon as possible. it is herewith sent and you can form your own opinion on it. No new tax law yet passed, though the large appropriations that have been made will render one necessary it is expected, & a bill is before the house of R. laying direct tax on land, houses, and slaves to be apportioned among the states according to the rule prescribed in the constitution of the United states.

You ask when I expect to be at home, it is not possible to form at this day any correct opinion as to the time, though I hope to be there in all the next month



The price of tobacco next winter and spring will probably depend much on the quality made, and the ease with which it may be got to Europe, from the present times there, it can not I think be very low. I was a few days past told, that in France it now sells for about 30 dollars per hundred, and that price must be produced by a scarcity, and our crop will not make [such] plenty as to reduce the price very much.

I am sir

Yr most obedient sevt,

NATHL MACON.

Roderic Bigelow

N. B. I have not been able to find out where Branham now lives, nor do I know that he has moved

N. M.

NATHANIEL MACON TO RODERIC BIGELOW.

Philadelphia 27 April 1800

Sir

Permit me to ask the favor of you to send the enclosed to Mr Thornton's the evening after you may receive this: The great desire that it may be early received induces me to make this request.

I begin to think that it is very probable an attempt will be made before Congress adjourns to raise the duty on imported article. if the attempt succeeds, it will also raise the price on the articles themselves to those who consume them: It will not I suppose be so easy as was imagined to make a loan, with-



out providing ways and means to pay it. I hope to be at home by the 21 next month.

I am sir

Yr most obt sevt.

NATHL MACON.

Mr Roderic Bigelow

Moseley's Ferry, N. C.

Washington 17 Feb. 1801

Sir

The House of Representatives this day made the 36 ballot for President when Jefferson was elected by ten states.

I am Sir, your most obt Svt,

NATHANIEL MACON.

Mr Roderic Bigelow

Moseley's Ferry Roanoke Cr

No Carolina.

J. A. BAYARD TO ALLAN McCLANE.<sup>1</sup>

Washington 17 Feb. 1801.

Dear Sir

"Mr. Jefferson is our President . our opposition was continued till it was demonstrated that Burr would not be brought in & even if he could he meant to come in as a democrat. In such case to evidence his sincerity he must have swept every office in the U. States. I have direct information that Mr Jefferson will not pursue that plan.

"The New-England gentlemen came out and declared they meant to go without a constitution & take the risk of a civil war. They agreed that those who would not agree to incur such an extremity ought to secede without loss of time. We pressed

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<sup>1</sup>Marked copy of a copy.





them to go with us & preserve unity in our measures. After great agitation & much heat they all agreed but one. But in consequence of his standing out the others refused to abandon their old friend.

"Mr. J. did not get a federal vote. Vermont gave a vote by means of Morris withdrawing. The same thing happened with Maryland & the votes of S. Carolina & Delaware were blank.

I have taken good care of you & think, if prudent, *you* are safe.

Your ob. servant,

J. A. B."

Addressed "J. A. Bayard

"Free

Allan McClane Esq.

"Wilmington

Delaware"

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### JEFFERSON MSS.\*

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Buck Spring, May 24, 1801

Sir

Your favor of the 14 instant has been received and the enclosed put in the post office at Warrenton for Mr Potter, I have written to him fully on the appointment, and have hopes that he will accept. I have candidly stated to him, the probability of the act under which he is appointed being repealed. I saw him last week, though not knowing whether he would be appointed, I did not say so much to him, as I have written. I

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\*In Division of MSS. Library of Congress.



will endeavor again to see him in two or three weeks. If I should I will inform you the result of our conversation.

In every recommendation I shall carefully endeavor to select such as can discharge the duty of the office, and have been uniformly Democratic, although I do not wish any person turned out of office who was a whig in the Revolutionary war for any opinions he may now hold, yet I would not recommend one for office who had not been always Republican; I am confident that Mr Potter would not suffer by a comparison with Sitgreaves or Hill.

I have been informed that the collector at Edenton, was during the war, a New York-Long Island Tory, but of the fact I have not sufficient information to speak positive, if it be so, ought he to be continued. The fact I suppose can be ascertained next winter at Washington.

I am pretty well assured, that a systematic opposition may be expected, it was probably organized at Washington last winter. I have been a good deal about since my return, and find the feds. every where trying to impress their principles on the people, but without effect. General Davis is not returned. I shall endeavor to see him as soon as possible. I sincerely hope that he may be willing to undertake the negotiation with the Indians. Your acquaintance Mr Willis Jones is I fear not long for this world, he is unable to walk, and there is no probability, that he ever will again.

I am with great respect

Sir yr most obt svt,

NATHL MACON.

recd May 30.





NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

1676156 Buck Spring 17 June 1802.

Sir

Believing that it will not be disagreeable to you to hear the sentiments of the people in different parts of the Union and having since my return been in three of the adjoining counties, I with real pleasure inform you, that all (except those who were not expected to be pleased) seem to be perfectly satisfied with the conduct of those, to whom they have entrusted the management of their public affairs; some who before the electoral election appeared to be almost indifferent as to the elector have declared their sincere approbation of the choice and their joy that the late election gave birth to an administration which deserves the support of every American

I was at Raleigh the first of June. Judge Hall of South Carolina not attending, there was no court for the trial of causes. Mr Harris attended and done every thing which could be done by a judge. I saw General Davis there, had some conversation with him, from which I hope he is inclined to give the present administration his support. I only mention this because very different reports were circulated at Washington last winter. The only hope of the dissatisfied is to produce a division among the Republicans, of which I hope there is no danger. I also hope none of them want offices, office hunters are never to be satisfied.

Everyone pleased with the appointing Potter district Judge, and none that I know displeased with appointment of Harris.

I am with respect

Sir yr. obt. svt,

NATHL MACON.

Thomas Jefferson



DUNCAN CAMERON TO JOHN MOORE.<sup>2</sup>

Hillsboro Sept 1 1802

John Moore Esq,

Sir: Although I have not the pleasure of being personally known to you, I am induced to address this letter to you, from reasons which will be fully explained in the course of it. Some few weeks past I received from our mutual friend Colo. — a letter from which I beg leave to offer to your consideration the following extract “The political opinion of a great portion of our citizens seem to me to grow out of hatred and party principles. They are in the habit of reading, and I am strengthened in this belief from assurance that Duane published and disseminated into all parts of the United States many hundred papers that never were subscribed for, and that Gales from the first year at this place pursued the same measure. If these suggestions be true. It would seem to be the duty of the federalists to pursue the same means to promote their views. And in a conversation with A. D. Moore at this place some weeks ago, It was proposed that a subscription should be set on foot in each District to raise money sufficient to furnish about ten newspapers for each county in a district which should

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<sup>2</sup>Duncan Cameron leading Federalist in North Carolina.

## NATHAN ALEXANDER TO NATHANIEL MACON.

Dr Sir—

Feb'y 14 1805

The letter herewith given to you is a copy of a letter purporting to have been written by Mr. D. Cameron of Hillsboro to Colo. John Moore of Lincoln county, which letter I have great reason to believe was genuine and that the copy now in my possession in the handwriting of my brother Wallace was taken from the original but this circumstance I can not now prove as he is since dead. I herewith offer it to you to make use of as you may think proper for the general good provided I am not personally implicated but if this should be necessary I shall not flinch I am with esteem your most obedient

Nathan Alexander

N. Macon



be sent to men of democratic principles of a moderate kind by the printer. Mr Boylan has said that he will furnish 600 papers weekly at \$1.25 each for a year, which is as low as the price of the labor and paper would enable him to print them. It was further agreed between the mayor and myself that this scheme should be communicated to the following persons in the several Districts, that is by him, the Printer, William Boylan for New Bern, W. B. Grove for Fayetteville and Col. Ashe for Wilmington; by myself to Colo. John Moore for Morgan, Archibald Henderson for Salisbury. D. Cameron for Hillsboro, W. R. Davis for Halifax and by the latter some person in Edenton District. That as soon as subscribers sufficient to furnish the number of papers were obtained and the names of the persons unto whom the printer should direct them were fixed upon, that the list should be sent to Mr Boylan who would then commence the publication. I have been engaged so much in office duties ever since this meeting of Major Moore's and mine, that I never once thought of it till yesterday I received a letter from him saying that Colo. Ashe had got the requested sum subscribed for Wilmington District. I have not written to any one of the gentlemen on the subject, but shall do so shortly to Genl. Davis, and as you are, if I understood you when I saw you last at this place, going to Salisbury and Morgan Count. I take the liberty of requesting you to open the plan to Mr Henderson and Colo. Moore, and if it meets their approbation, that they, as soon as practicable, furnish the necessary information to the Printer."

When I had the pleasure to see Colo. — at Raleigh during the last session of the Federal Court, I mentioned to him that I had some intention of being at Morgan Sept. Term but I have declined it at present. It was under the impression that I should do so, that he has requested me to open the plan detailed in the foregoing extract from his letter. I have been induced to do so as well because he relied upon my making the communication





to you as that from what I have always understood to be your political character with perfect confidence in your zealous co-operation with us in executing a plan which has for its end the noble objects of suppressing falsehood and disseminating truth, of subverting the wild and visionary projects and opinions of Democracy and advocating in their place sound, substantial, practical principles of Federalism—Immediately after receiving Colo. ——'s letter, I communicated the plan to a few confidential friends and with great ease obtained [in obtaining] subscriptions to the amount of 75 Dollars which sum at the rate proposed will pay for sixty newspapers. That is ten for each county in this District—Wake excepted, which I leave to the gentlemen of Raleigh, and I also made a list of ten persons in each of the counties whose political characters I have known of the kind mentioned in his letter which list I have forwarded to the Printer. Should you approve of this plan as I highly flatter myself you will, I think it to be advisable to open the project to such characters only as you may know or believe to be confidential. It may be dangerous and tend to defeat the plan if a knowledge of it became common. I communicated [it?] only to fifteen persons and each of the subscribers five dollars the sum proposed and from them raised seventy five dollars above spoken of. If you adopt a similar plan and the subscription should not appear too high for each person perhaps it would be well to do so.

I am &c

DUNCAN CAMERON.

Colo. Jno. Moore Lincolnton N. C.



RICHARD STANFORD TO HIS WIFE.<sup>3</sup>

Washington City, January 23, 1804.

I am, my dear girl, gratified tonight with your two favors of the 1st and 9th insts. and the more so that they were not expected till the usual period of the week.

I can only return your "*own*" husband's earnest wish that you too should see *an happy new year*, and that we may both see many of them happily together. For the kind and interesting exhortations of my dear wife I thank her. I would that my cold heart was with my reason "to improve each moment as it flies". Portius had informed me of Mr. Dicken's death and here too, we are almost daily witnessing that "man is but a thing of naught, and his life passeth away as a shadow".

I am pleased to hear that Miss Russell's school continues to grow, and that there is a prospect of her keeping another quarter. To manage the business you will please to subscribe 4 on my account and if you know any poor little girls in the neighborhood whose parents are not well able to pay you can indulge your charity and direct two of them to be sent on your account. This your two and my two will make out the four. I am quite willing to pay for 4 that Miss Russell may be induced to keep another quarter. In deed I should be sorry she should quit before my return.

You should remember she is a poor young woman and report says an amiable one and should not be made to feel her condition, and as things are attentions from you are more due and expected than from any other quarter. But that my wife is not wanting in any of her *duties* is what "*her own*" happily believes.

R. STANFORD.

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<sup>3</sup>This letter is furnished by a descendant of Stanford, Samuel L. Adams Esq., of South Boston, Va. Stanford was a member of Congress from North Carolina, 1798-1816.





**JOS. H. NICHOLSON. MSS.\***NATHANIEL MACON To Jos. H. NICHOLSON.<sup>4</sup>

Buck Spring 6 August 1803.

Sir

Yours of the 21 ultimo has been received, although I have nothing to tell you, I write because you ask it. I have answered your other and returned the enclosed, since which I have thought a little on Judge Chase's charge and submit for your consideration the following queries:

1. ought a Judge to be impeached for a charge to a grand jury because it contains matter of which the grand jury have not cognizance.
2. ought a judge to be impeached for a charge to a grand jury, not legal but political
3. ought a judge to be impeached, for delivering in his charge to the grand jury, political opinions which every man may fully enjoy & freely express.
4. ought a judge to be impeached for delivering his political opinions in a charge to the grand jury, and which any member of Congress might deliver to the house of which he is a member.
5. ought a Judge to be impeached because he avows monarchical principles in his charge to a g. j.

Is error of opinion to be dreaded when inquiry is free: Is the liberty of the press of any real value, when the political charges of a Judge are dreaded; What effect have they produced (Judicial political charges) in the United States. If a Judge ought to be impeached for avowing monarchical principles to the Grand Jury in his charge, what ought to be done

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\*These papers are in the possession of Hon. A. B. Hagner, Washington D. C.

<sup>4</sup>Nicholson a member of Congress from Maryland 1801 to 1806.



with those who appoint them who actually supported them in the field. I must stop or weary you with inquiries, perhaps was I more of the lawyer and less of the planter I might see that none of these questions touched the case, although the same principle is involved in the whole of them, it does not seem improper to examine each, because if either of them embrace the question it deserves the most serious consideration before a single step be taken. Change the scene and suppose Chase had stretched as far on the other side, and had praised where no praise was deserving, would it be proper to impeach, because by such conduct he might lull the people to sleep while their interest was destroyed. I have said this much to hear your opinions on some of the points, nor can I quite without express I to you [withhold expressing to you] my firm conviction that you, if any attempt be made to impeach, ought not to be the leader.

As to the question about the recession of Louisiana to Spain, or rather to exchange it for the Floridas, I have never heard it mentioned till I received your letter, yesterday, since which I have not examined it, with respect to boundaries. I perfectly agree with you, though I do not concur with you in one of the reasons: I think representative government the only one which could govern the whole world.

It appears by the last *Aurora* that democrats in and about Philadelphia had settled their disputes, but if the minority were Burrites, they will not be easy, they would I fear join any interest to be in power.

I am informed that Jaycocks has ceased being a candidate, so that Aleson & Davis seem alone, I have also been informed that great exertions have been made, & will be continued till the election which is next Thursday and Friday, in other districts candidates remain as in my last.

Be pleased to tender my best respects to Mrs. N. tell Ed-



ward I expect he is good at hopping before this, and believe me to be with unfeigned esteem

Yours sincerely

NATHL MACON.

To J. H. N.

Centreville, Eastern Shore Md.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Buck Spring 5, S'p. 1803.

Sir

It is with real pleasure, that I inform you, that the Republican cause is daily gaining ground with us: not only the late elections but the candid acknowledgement of many that they have been deceived fully confirm the fact: and this gaining is clearly the effect of observation on the difference between the present and past times by the people, and it is worthy of notice that the district which sends the only federalist from the state to Congress, gave a majority of votes to Republican candidates, and I must add that it is also worthy of notice, that during the present administration, not a single person has been dismissed from office in this state, although with one exception I believe they were all federal, though not I hope of the same sort, which abound in some other places.

The acquisition of Louisiana has given general satisfaction, though the terms are not correctly known. But if it is within the compass of the present revenue, the purchase, when the terms are known, will be more admired than even now.

If the Floridas can be obtained on tolerable terms and the belligerent powers only treat us as well as we deserve: we have nothing to make us [the U. S.] uneasy, unless it be the party madness of some of our dissatisfied citizens.





We have tolerable crops in this county though in some degree injured by hard winds.

I am sir,

With great respect

Yr most obt. servt,

NATHANL MACON.

**MONROE MSS.\***

NATHANIEL MACON TO JAMES MONROE.

Sir

Washington 15 Nov. 1803.

I have taken the liberty to transmit the enclosed to you, with a request that the certificate may be sent by post, agreeable to the direction of the letter. I ask this to serve our young countryman and to oblige his Republican parents.

Congress have passed all the laws necessary to carry into effect the treaty & conventions concerning Louisiana. The whole transaction is generally well received and popular: though it is due to truth to say, that some of your friends would rather the two million of dollars appropriated at the last session of Congress should have been otherwise applied: It is feared that the application has something local in it, though not towards Virginia: you will pardon my saying this much, and be assured that it has proceeded from a sincere desire to communicate that which I think you ought to know; More would have been said, but it is believed some of your many friends must have written to you on the subject.

Permit me ask of you to inform me whether Mr. Brodis receives the certificate. I wish this for the satisfaction of his parents.

I am with great and sincere respect

Sir yr obt. svt.

Mr. Monroe.

NATHL MACON.

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\*In Division of Manuscripts. Library of Congress



NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Washington 13 Feby 1804.

Sir

By last mail I received enclosed; After reading I will thank you to return it. I have written to another friend for information concerning the grapes as soon as I hear from him, you shall be informed, whether more sorts can be obtained.

I am with very great respect

Sir yr most obt. servt,

NATHL MACON.

(In Jefferson's Handwriting)

William Hawkins to Mr. Macon, Warren county Feb. 4,  
1804

there are but two kinds of grapes remaining  
one, oval, purple, early ripe  
the other round, white,

Dr. Brekon is supposed to have taken cuttings of  
all the various kinds which Col Hawkins had  
enquiry shall be made.

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**JEFFERSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Buck Spring 2 Sept. 1804.

Sir

Our elections are over, and at the next Congress N. C. will be unanimous on the Republican side. McFarland who last



winter contested the seat of Purviance is elected, in the district where they live, was the only federal candidate in the State.

The claim of the heirs of Lord Granville has made a good deal of noise, but that now begins to abate, people seem to care very little about it at present.

In this neighborhood crops are very sorry, in June too much rain, in July and August too little, though the county will make enough for its own consumption I expect. In some neighborhoods they have tolerable crops.

American politics scarcely ever mentioned, nearly all seem to be satisfied: The conduct of the belligerent nations on sea to our vessels is not quite so satisfactory; But neutrals will always in some degree be damaged by the powers at war, and the U. S. will I hope for ever be neutral. The trifling injury is not to be compared, with the advantage of the neutral situation, and of peace; It is to be expected some of our merchants will venture in illicit trade, and these will make the most noise if they do not succeed.

I know full well that the executive is held responsible for appointments, and this may be a reason, for appointing members of Congress, but it is a truth, that people do not like to see so many appointments made from that body. I mention this, because it may be possible your other friends may not have done so, and because I believe you ought to be informed of it, you will I know place it to its true motive; I am sir, with sincere esteem, yr most obt. svt,

NATHL MACON.

Marked by Jefferson "recd Sept 11."





**JOS. H. NICHOLSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Buck Spring 7 Sept. 1804

Sir

Our Elections over, and to the next Congress N. C. will have all Republicans. McFarland who contested Purviance's right to a seat is elected; he will be the only new member from the state.

Judging by the contents of the Aurora there seems to be a little ferment in Philadelphia; T. C. (?) will be heard of farther than the Aurora itself, and Dr S. will at least keep pace with that paper. These trifling disputes in the large cities cannot produce any good to the republican cause, in time they may spread, and be an injury to the U. S. though I do not believe any real evil will immediately result from them.

Has Our Friend Capt. Jones arrived, my anxiety to be informed has forced me to ask the question

Our crops of corn in this neighborhood are sorry indeed. It is possible the county may make enough for its consumption, but the price to purchasers, must be high beyond example: The prospect is alarming, and grain will be more scarce than I ever knew it. This will also make pork scarce, and dear.

The conduct of the British armed vessels as stated in the newspapers is disagreeable indeed, but it cannot be possible that the statements are correct, if they were, the price of American produce would decline.

I congratulate both you and Mrs Nicholson on the birth of your daughter and sincerely hope she may possess every quality, which may give pleasure & satisfaction to you both: I flatter myself with the happiness of seeing her next winter, with my friend Edward, and it would be pleasing to see with



you, the good damsels who were with you last winter. They would be company for Mrs. N and make her time more agreeable while you were in Congress.

Where do you think of boarding, and will you be at Washington the first day of the session

The Federalists in this part of the State have not yet mentioned a name for elector nor is it probable they will unless they do it a few days before the election.

I am sir

Yrs truly & sincerely

NATHL MACON.

N. B. I rec'd yours in answer to my first.  
J. H. N. Centreville Md

NATHANIEL MACON To Jos. H. NICHOLSON.

Buck Spring 1 June 1806

Sir

I have with uncommonly great pleasure received the letter which you wrote me on the 15 ultimo, because it is the only one, except one from Randolph which I have had from any friend written since Congress adjourned, and it is the more pleasing, because you begin with saying I have nothing to tell you, that is from heart to heart. Pray write often they will always be acceptable especially when they inform me that you, your lady and children are well, and that all your concerns prosper, and that you may never have cause to communicate anything else is my fervent prayer.

Madison I still think will be the next President, if the New Yorkers mean to run Clinton in Good earnest as we country people say, it is time they had begun. The Madisonians will not lose any thing by neglect or indolence, they may over act their part, and in their zeal to keep Randolph down, may



make some lukewarm about Madison: If R. had have stuck to the embargo, he would have been up in spite of them: I have been to our county court since my return, and at a public dinner where there were a considerable number of people present, I gave my opinion freely as to the next President and the character talked of for it, and the man whom I would prefer, Some stared and after a while objected to the man in the usual cant, that he came from Geneva but the number that objected were not large nor did the objection seem to have weight with many, having named him I defended him with true democratic zeal, and a very respectable methodist and a good republican besides, observed in the spirit of meekness and truth, that the more he knew of him the more he admired him, he wrote to me last winter and made some inquiries about Gallatin, in answer I sent his speech before the legislature of Pennsylvania, in defence of the elections held in the four western counties at the time of the riot there, also those in Congress on the navy and foreign intercourse;—Madison will I think get the votes of N. C. for President and a part [of] them merely because there is not a serious opposition to him.

I have no tobacco plants, too much rain for wheat. The peas in the garden about 8 [in] high and corn remarkably low for the season, with the exception of plants I found my plantation in tolerable good condition.

Each of my daughters had a son while I was absent, so that I have now six grandsons,—If you see Lloyd or write to him remember me to him; and you must tell Mrs. Nicholson, that I fear I shall be compelled to ask her next winter, to make a cap like the one she made before for me, when at Washington.

Shake her and Edward by the hand for me, and do not let him forget me. Believe me yrs most sincerely,

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

Baltimore Md.





NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 2 Dec. 1806

Sir

In the disagreeable seat of Speaker, I write. I have been obliged to hear the journal read, in which the name of J. R. was not on the Comtee of Ways and Means. Many may no doubt think my feelings were too nice on this occasion, but such was my sense of duty, that I could not act otherwise. My mind was so agitated last night after writing to you, that I spent a sleepless night—write me your opinion on this to me delicate subject.

Yrs. truly

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

Annapolis Md.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Buck Spring 19. June 1807

Sir

A few days past I was highly gratified by the receipt of your letter of the 27 ultimo. It is certainly true that I have not written to you before since Congress adjourned and it is equally true, that I often thought of writing & always postponed in the hope that something of the agreeable might occur, which might be worth relating; since my return, almost every countenance has had the appearance of distress, it was to me evident, that the expectation of want was strongly marked in most faces. Grain has been more scarce than [it] was last fall expected owing I imagine to the severity of the winter. Hitherto I believe people have made out to live without suffering & forward



wheat may cut next week, if the weather permit; But the crop of every kind of wheat is much worse than I ever saw. The loss of stock in the winter and spring was immense.

Since my return I have been mostly at home and have scarcely ever heard the next presidential election mentioned, though I am inclined to think at this time Clinton would unite more votes in this state than any other man. Madison probably more than Monroe but this is all guess and nothing more. As to myself I would prefer Gallatin to any man in the nation, and were the Republicans to make such an effort as they made to get Jefferson elected the first time, I am sure he would be elected by a great majority. The Yorkers will I think be strong for C'n. Virginia in Congress divided between M-n & M-e—but a majority for M-n. Those who made C-n Vice President may find him in their way, notwithstanding his age. The sending back the treaty will I think injure M-e, it will be taken as a proof that Jefferson did not approve his conduct, and certainly his signing it without making provision for the sailors, will injure him in all the commercial towns.

I heartily wish that I could be with you for a few days. I want much to see you. Tell Mrs. Nicholson & Edward Howdye and if you see Lloyd or Lowdnes remember me to them.

I am yours most truly

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

Annapolis Md.

RICHARD STANFORD TO HIS WIFE.

Washington City, Feb'y 27, 1808.

My dear girl;—

I cover you a letter for Uncle Tom Lloyd if he should move soon to Roaches place. I made your consent the condition



because if he should undertake I want you to let him know you have no objection except as to the horses which from the charge I gave you about them you can't consent should ever be used off the one or the other plantations. When they go to mill I would rather you sent Stephen than any one else with them.

While he keeps sober he will suit you well till my return. Before you give him the letter I want you to tell Ariana to copy it and keep the copy for me. In my next I shall give more directions about the field &c.,

We have debated one day about adjourning and did not come to any decisive vote because it was said we dare not go home before the embargo was taken off, or disposed of in some way or other lest if we did the people might drive us back to take it off or to make peace or war or do something which they could understand. To be serious I don't know what is yet to be our fate and that is everything that keeps us here. Our great ones here are negotiating an negotiating ever on and can't agree but the moment they agree (if they should do it at all) we shall adjourn. This although it may happen, in a week may not for several weeks.

I am glad you took Miss McKey home with you, I have neglected the old man and will write him this week.

Be a patient good wife, and keep up your spirits and tell Saurrin I have sent him a red cap and must be weaned when I come home.

With love to you all.

R. STANFORD.





**JOS H. NICHOLSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 29 March 1808

Sir

When great men so called, agree in general principles, or in other words when the men held up for the next President are of the same political party, is it worth while for little men so called to take great concern which of these shall fill the office or the great house if you had rather. I have been led to this thought, in consequence of the feelings which were apparent in the countenance of many of the members of the house since the communications of the President have been reading; The face generally showed whether the person was for Madison or Monroe. The Clintonians evidently seemed to be on the Monroe side; In reflecting on the subject I have been inclined to an opinion that the great so called might as well take care of themselves and their character as those who are not so called; When a principle is involved in the election of a particular man, it is then quite a different question; where men of the same principles are candidates for the same office it looks much like a contest for the loaves & fishes; If this should fortunately not be the case in the U. S. either at this or any future time our lot will be happy indeed; But with us there may be another cause for supporting candidates of the same principles, this is state prejudice or partiality, to which may be added the general unwillingness of great states to have either P—— or V. P. from small states, if none of the above conjectures should ever apply to the people of the U. S. may we not with truth say that we are a highly favored nation.

I suspect we shall have a dust raised in the house before the adjournment, but on what subject I cannot guess, but the house is so engaged in President making, that it seems to me



there must be an explosion before we part, too much heat has been collected since we have been reading and not speaking to be suffered to waste away.

The members are obtaining leave to go home fast.

I am yours truly

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 4 April 1808

Sir

Yours of the 2 instant was last night received, the opinion mentioned by you as given by some federalists is the universal doctrine of that party & I fear that some of another party are not very different in their sentiments; but our situation is every day growing worse and it seems to me, that we must prepare for the last reasoning of nations or rather of governments, and in this situation we must raise a few troops for some defenceless places; Indeed the attack on the Chesapeake was war on the part of Great Britain; We must either repeal the law which authorized the President to issue the proclamation or take some steps to enforce it.

I see much of out of doors doings that I hardly know what to do, or what to think; Randolph will I expect oppose the bill for raising 6000 men; so that he and myself will split on the question, you remember that 2 yrs. ago we split on the question for raising troops he for and myself against.

The debate on the bill is commenced by Clopton.

I shall get Mr. Gallatin to send you the documents which have been printed.

Yrs truly

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.



NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 6 April 1808

Sir

The bill to raise men is yet under debate. Stanford yesterday gave historical account of all the votes given in 98, and Randolph a very able speech both against, though neither of them convinced me, that the state of our affairs were the same now as in 98. Mosely opened this morning against and Talladge [Tallmadge] is now speaking for, so that I suppose both old parties will be divided.

I am still an invalid with a sore breast with the addition to day of a severe headache.

I really do not know what to write you, I am not in the secrets of any one here, no not one; all, all except myself are engaged in making Presidents; and you know enough of public life, to know that in great election contests, he that does not take an active part on one side or the other, is generally hated by both, and always suspected by both, no matter how honest his indifference or how sincerely he may believe the contest a matter of no consequence, or how willing he may be to support one, whom he would prefer to either of those named, and one whom he thought better qualified in every respect for the appointment, but whom neither of the parties would take, not because he is unfit.

This will satisfy and convince you that I have nothing to write; and I am sure you must be tired of reading that which is written only because I could not find any thing else to communicate.

Remember that I am always glad to see your hand writing and the more I am secluded from the rest of my friends, the more anxious I am to get a line from you.





Salute Mrs. N. & children after the manner of St Paul for me and believe me to be your friend

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 4 Dec. 1808

Sir

It is true that I have letters from you since I left Baltimore that of the 3 inst. came too late yesterday for me to see Whitcroft, and this being Sunday nothing can be done. I will endeavor to-morrow to see him and to transmit you the desired receipt.

I was at Gallatin's last evening, made the inquiry you desired, he answered that he possessed no more information on the subject than you did, nor can I give any advice, because I have no fact on which to ground an opinion.

The war men in the house of Representatives are I conceive gaining strength and I should not be much surprised if we should be at war with both G. B. & F. before the 4 of March; Gallatin is most decidedly for war, and I think that the Vice President and W. C. Nicholas are of the same opinion; It is said that the President gives no opinion as to the measure that ought to be adopted, it is not known whether he be for war or for peace, it is reported that Mr. Madison is for the plan, which I have submitted, with the addition of high protecting duties to encourage the manufactures of the U. S. I am as much against war as Gallatin is in favor of it, thus I have continued in Congress till there is not one of my old fellow-laborers, that agrees with me in opinion. I do not know what plan Randolph will pursue. He is against continuing the embargo, I wish he would lay some plan before the house, it grieves me to the heart, to



be compelled from a sense of right & duty to oppose him.

I am not consulted as you seem to suppose about anything, nor do I consult any one. I am about as much out of fashion as our grand-mothers ruffle cuffs, and I do not believe that I shall be in fashion as soon as they will.

God bless you and your family.

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

P. S. It is probable, that the embargo may be taken off before the adjournment, we have those who think it will and that war will immediately follow. I suspect all the N. E. Republicans are for war & no embargo, you know it is no easy task to prevent what they want.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 28 Feby 1809

Sir

Otis the secretary of the Senate, has this minute informed the H. of R. that the Senate have agreed to the amendments made by the House to the bill to repeal the embargo &c &c.

The Lord the Mighty Lord must come to our assistance, or I fear we are undone as a nation.

Offer my best respects to Mrs. N. and tender my love to the children. Yr. friend

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 23 May 1809

Sir

I have this moment, and since writing this morning, received your letter of the 20 instant. I will endeavor to un-



derstand the subject, and if I can, I will either bring it before the House or get some one else to do it, who may stand a better chance to succeed: I am not a good accountant and know nothing about bills of exchange. I mean the practical part; whether the gentleman you name, would willingly make the motion I think doubtful. I wish your consent to keep the letter to Taylor, and perhaps to Bibb and Madison; I think also that it would be well to send it to Randolph, unless that part which relates to Gallatin may make it improper.

God grant you and your family health, happiness & prosperity.

Most truly yours sincerely

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 25 May 1809

Sir

After writing yesterday I received the letter you wrote me on the day before. I wish that I could tell you that I could join you at Baltimore and go to Chesterfield, there is certainly no place in this world that I would more willingly visit, besides the pleasure of being there, I should add that of seeing Lloyd. But I fear it is impossible for me to visit you this summer; I wrote you yesterday that Randolph had moved for an investigating committee. The debate on the motion, though carried unanimously, has made it improper for me to be a member of the committee if the speaker should appoint me.

Randolph's motion is reconsidered for the purpose of striking out that part which relates to reporting provisions for the better accountability of public money. I am for striking out and leaving the Comtee nothing to do except the examination





of the expenditure and the application of public money. I wish this that the Comtee be them, who they may, may have no excuse for not making a full investigation; It is not impossible but a committee might without design be appointed, which might be willing to let the subject be passed over, without a thorough examination.

Remember the order of the day, that is to remember me to the family.

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

Baltimore Md.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 23 June 1809

Sir

Last evening I received yours of the 21 inst. I showed it this morning to Mr. & Mrs. Gallatin, the latter said we are all modest, and the former that every thing would be done, that could be done with propriety. Every thing in my power will be done and I may tell you in confidence that although the committee are well disposed, owing to R. various engagements on committees leaves me much of the inquiring part. Gallatin's answer to the inquiries are not received by the committee.

I can not say that it will be in my [power to] visit you this summer. I will write you again my determination. Capt. Jones has pressed me much to visit him after the adjournment.

I sincerely wish that it may never so happen that the invisibles<sup>5</sup> govern the nation without check. Last spring [torn out of MSS] their power in treas. department, and that in conversation many declare independence of them, yet on a

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<sup>5</sup>The Giles, Smith, Duane faction in Cabinet and Senate.



vote they never fail to have a majority. If they are to govern, it would be better that they governed according to the constitution, than in the way they do, another now stands between them and the people.

Written in the house

God bless you & yours

NATHL MACON.

P. S. I wrote you this week twice to Annapolis & before twice to Centreville N. M.

J. H. N.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 3 April 1810

Sir

Yesterday I received the letter you wrote me on the 1 (current) & am very happy indeed to hear of Mrs. Nicholson's recovery. While I think of it let me tell you, that I have not had a word from you, about the \$5 you had for the printer, I wish you would send me his receipt for R. H. Jones for the amount, I believe his name was John C. Hall. You however will recollect it. I wrote to him that you would pay him, and I think showed you the letter when you were here.

By the papers you will see, that we are debating a motion made by R. to repeal the non intercourse law. This motion is hardly worth the time that has already been consumed, and I apprehend we shall hardly decide it to day.

Among many members there is a desire to do something, by which is meant to pass some act, which shall operate on both the belligerents. But I have not discovered any system except that which has been lost between the two houses, which would not also operate very strongly on us; an embargo could it be carried, is the only measure which would bring G. Britain



to terms. There is no chance for that, and that would probably have more effect on France than any other measure.

I am decidedly for reducing the army and navy or rather for putting them altogether down, and if we have any military take a new start, the present army is destroyed by the hatred of those who are opposed to M— to those who support him, or more properly they hate each other too much to be in the same service.

I was at Gallatin's yesterday. Gordon continues to mend slowly: The Feds seem to be in good spirits. They pay more attention to our friend<sup>6</sup> than I ever saw one set of men pay to any man.

I am yours most sincerely

NATHL. MACON.

N. B. Observe the speeches in "Spirit of '76" &<sup>7</sup> write me, whether you think it an impartial paper.

J. H. N.

Baltimore Md.

NATHANIEL MACON To Jos. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 10 April 1810

Sir

I rejoice to learn by your letter of the 15 instant that Mrs. Nicholson was in a fair way to regain her health. God grant she may do it immediately.

I was at Gallatin's this morning. Gordon continues to mend slowly, has for the two last days missed the chills mentioned to you last week.

I am at a loss to guess, what we shall do, on the subject of foreign relations. The bill in the inclosed paper called Ma-

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<sup>6</sup>Randolph

<sup>7</sup>A paper published, in the interest of Monroe and for which John Taylor of Caroline was a frequent contributor.





cons No 2 is not really Macon's, though he reported it as namesake. It is in truth Taylor's.<sup>8</sup> This I only mention to you. Because when it comes to be debated I shall not act the part of a father, of a step father.

Burwell and Eppes still talk about their convoy bills, each professing his own. The convoy, the ways & means & the bank will make some warm talk I expect.

Tender my good wishes to Mrs. N. remember me to the children & believe me

Yrs truly & sincerely

N. M.

J. H. N.

Baltimore.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 21 April 1810

Sir

We have passed and sent to the Senate the 2d bill reported by me, with an amendment proposed by Johnson of Kentucky to lay 50 per cent on the duties now payable on French and English goods, but which new duties are to cease when the decrees and orders of G. B. & France are withdrawn, which is to be notified by proclamation of the President, when either or both shall withdraw their edicts. This bill it seems to me will neither encourage manufactures nor add to the income, after the first quarter & yet its advocates imagine it will do both, the uncertainty of its continuance will prevent its producing either effect. Kentucky, Pennsa, New Jersey and the New England Republicans are full of manufacturing, to these may be [added] some of the Virga Republ's.

This plan is said to be a cabinet project, if so it satisfies me, that the cabinet is hard pushed for a plan, but it may have been

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<sup>8</sup>John Taylor of South Carolina



taken, to prevent a worse, or to prevent the continuance of the present non-intercourse system; some who opposed No 1 wished it had become a law. I mean feds. I am almost apprehensive that the invisibles may be at the bottom of this amendment before mentioned, with a view to injure Gallatin, they may if they can ascertain its fate in the Senate by indirect means and before a vote is taken, take the side which may best answer their purpose, if it will not pass they may (if it be a cabinet measure) support it, to show their zeal for the administration, and if it will pass without their aid, they may oppose it, to show that G— neither understands how to get money in the Treasury by new taxes, nor how to encourage manufactures. He G— I am afraid is not enough on his [guard] as to these people; He ought to propose and adhere to his own financial plans. I have shown this Randolph—I write while Love is speaking on the bank.

Yours most sincerely

N. M.

J. H. N. Baltimore.

NATHANIEL MACON To Jos. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington Half past 3 o'clock p. m.

28. April 1810

Sir

The House is engaged on the bill to reduce the naval establishment and have begun to take yeas and nays. It is quite probable that all the attempt to reduce expenditure at this session will prove abortive; It is possible it may tend to make some of the public functionaries a little more attentive to acconomy, the speeches on the floor may produce this effect, all agree that the expenditure in the Navy Department ought to be checked and yet it will not be checked I fear. Hamilton\* I believe is

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\*Paul Hamilton of South Carolina, Secretary of Navy.



honest and determined, but the abuses have got such strong hold, that it may be questioned, whether he has power to tear them up by the roots. It is also doubtful whether the army will be reduced; difficult as it may be thought to get an expensive establishment fixed on a free nation, it is certainly more difficult to get clear of one, when it is fixed. These establishments generally make convenient places for the Governmental connections, and their most obliging friends, and cruel is the task which uprightness imposes, to take these snug places from those that may be dear & necessary to the rulers.

The times have changed, the navy is now a Republican institution, and must be supported on loans, who of those, who loves one but must delight in the other; and with these the admirer must embrace executive discretion, which contrary to general laws of nature, grows more lovely & comely the more it is used, and the older it grows; it is not strange when the quality of this discretion is known, that those who some years past spoke of it as being more deformed and ugly than Cyclops, should now think it more comely than Venus, and more to [be] admired than christian faith or pure Gold, nay had Solomon have lived in this day he would have acknowledged that a navy was more to be coveted than true wisdom; nay instead of describing the holiness of wisdom and the loveliness of women he would have employed all his time, wisdom and knowledge in displaying the comeliness of a navy, and that without it civil liberty could not be maintained. And if he, Solomon, had not have been a man of peace, How elegantly could he have portrayed the great advantages of a well dressed standing army to preserve national liberty, over the ragged militia of the nation itself, which may be considered the nation, nay how easy could he have proved the people to be their worst enemies, and a standing army their only & best friends.

After reading this you will hardly wish another manuscript for some days.





Remember me to Mrs. N. & the children & believe me your faithful friend

NATHL MACON.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 17 Jan'y 1811

Sir

Yesterday and to-day, the house has been engaged on the bill to renew the charter of the U. S. (bank). The bill will not I imagine pass, it is reported, that it has fewer friends than at the last session; The present friends to a national bank may be divided into four classes, first for the renewall of the charter with some modification, second for a new bank, third establish a national bank at the next or some future session, fourth, use the State banks and their paper, all these are considered as having no constitutional objections.

I have understood, that Bruff<sup>10</sup> himself had mentioned the letters he had written to you, and that gave rise to the determination of the Comtee to call for them.

Remember me to Mrs. N. and the children, believe

Yours ever

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N. Baltimore.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Buck Spring 21 April 1811

Sir

I received a letter from Randolph dated Richmond 18 March, in which he informs me that he had made you a visit since Congress adjourned, and that yourself, Mrs. Nicholson and the whole family were well; I pray that you may all continue so

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<sup>10</sup>Head of the Branch of the National Bank in Washington?



for many years; But as I am informed you are all well; I cannot truly say that I write only to inquire after your and the family's health, which is at all times the most wellcome communication you can make.

Can you tell me how the change in the department of State was brought about. The office of State seems to be the path to Presidency, and the mission to Russia a port of political death-bed, notwithstanding J. Q. A. has been made a judge, the History of the transaction I should like to know, as well as by what means it was ascertained that Monroe would accept the appointment of Secty. of State; I make the inquiry of you, because I expect you [can] tell more than any correspondent I have. Randolph did not mention the subject in his letter. By the by it seems to me, that Monroe will be hard pressed, with British negotiations, on account of the treaty he made, which Mr. J. would not lay before the Senate.

Tender my best respects to Mrs. Nicholson; Howdye the children for me.

Yrs ever

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Buck Spring 23 March 1813

Sir

At Warrenton I received the letter which you wrote to me on the 2 instant, and yesterday returned from thence home. It is proper that I should state to you, that I am not acquainted with Capt. Phillips. The fact stated by me was I believe stated correctly, and it seems that it is the opinion which the Capt. supposes has injured him. The opinion that he was properly disinterested has been the only one I ever entertained on the subject, and it is the first time, that an opinion drawn from fact, has



been supposed to give offence. The opinion may be erroneous, but it may also be honest, as it really was. If I was convinced that it was erroneous, I would with pleasure retract it, but without this I never shall; I certainly had no intention to give offence to Captain Phillips or any man living, having stated the fact. The opinion was given without any previous determination to do so as well as I now recollect, I say recollect because the notes from which the speech was delivered have long since been destroyed: The Captain as I understood the affair, commanded a public armed ship and was cruising in her, when the men were taken from him, and he ought not in that case to have suffered his men to be taken from him. If I had thought that Mr. Adams had done wrong in dismissing him I think it quite likely that I should have said so, and this would not have been offensive to the Captain, and I had the same right to say what I did say, it was my opinion, and I had a right to give it, they were both public characters in the service of the nation at the time the affair happened. If I had have said any thing about him, not connected with his public duty, I should indeed feel great regret, but having said what I believed to be true, I can only regret, that my motives should have been misunderstood, nor can I conceive how an opinion drawn from a fact, without intention to offend can give offence, It is evident from the speech itself, that no individual was the object of it; and certainly the use made of the fact, can easily be seen from the speech; I did not know at the time, that he had not a commission, but if he was cruising under a letter from the secretary of the navy, it could not I apprehend be piracy to defend himself: I ought to tell you, that I have not the [speech] by me, of course do not recollect the words in which the fact is stated; but approving the conduct of Mr Adams is matter of opinion, and no words if decent can be improper. Indeed I had the fact of the British officer taking men, was all that was supposed to have any effect, it was the fact which was seized on. I am





sorry, that I should have wounded the feelings of an unfortunate man and one unknown to me, and that too without intention, but the opinion then entertained is still believed, I regret it the more, because the opinion could have no weight on the main question then under debate; to retract it without conviction that it was wrong can never be done but if convinced of the error, I will with pleasure retract it; Remember me to Mrs. Nicholson & the boys.

Yrs ever

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N. Baltimore.

COMPLAINT OF NORTH CAROLINA LEGISLATURE FOUND AMONG  
THE MACON PAPERS.

"We make this inquiry thus early after having assembled together that we may be able during our session to give to North Carolina an attitude suited to her population, and the extent of her resources, and to extend to our Sea Coast the requisite protection should it be longer withheld by the General Government. We invite your attention to the communications of His Excellency the Governor of this State with the Department of War of the United States and earnestly entreat you to give immediate effect to the mode of protection and defence therein pointed out."

Nov. 29, 1813.

NATHANIEL MACON TO JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 19 March 1814

Sir

I should like to know what the post Master here and at Baltimore, think of my writing so often to you, The correspondence they may think very interesting and on some important subjects if this should be their thoughts, how much they are mistaken,



but they are not more mistaken than many others who undertake to guess at what they believe others are doing, or intend to do, or what others think on particular subjects.

Our desire to talk for a day or two past, is quite as great as it was when the loan bill was under consideration.

I know nothing of the plans of the Comtee of ways & means. The house determined on Thursday not [to] alter in a small degree the act laying a duty on stills, which operated hard on us poor people of No Carolina, I have since told the chairman of the Committee of Ways & Means, to pay no regard to my former solicitations to report tax bills. that since the representation of a single member from Vermont had more weight than all the representatives of Carolina, I should hereafter hold back, unless the inconvenience before alluded to, was provided for; Well now this great news [is], but no kink, not important enough though, to keep you from sleep, or to make you scratch your head or rub your eyes.

Many things equally important might be added, but two such, would be too much for any one letter; even though it should be to a man who is both judge and President, therefore out of the *high respect* I entertain for you shall forbear, lest I take your mind from your responsible situations, that of Captain, Judge and President; when I reflect on the many high and important places you fill, I feel very great regret, that I have written so long and on so many subjects of such great consequence.

To Roane of Virginia I have read this letter, he says he never heard of so great a man and wants to know your name, this my same *high respect* for you, forbids me to give, though he is sure he must be a Virginian, as no other state produces such a consequential man.

I stop because an adjournment is called for.

God bless you and the family.

NATHL MACON.



NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Sir

Washington 21 March 1814

The bill to compromise the Yazoo claims is now under debate, and as I do not expect to hear any thing new, or anything old better than I have heard it said before, I have determined to give you the trouble of reading, whatever I may first think. I wrote you a very long letter on Saturday last, and one that I am sure you must answer with great pleasure.

The prospect at present seems to be that Congress will adjourn on the day fixed by the house of Representatives, though the Senate has not yet acted on the resolution.

I hear not a word as to the intention of the Committee of Ways & Means on the subject of revenue;

It will I imagine soon be ascertained whether the loan can be obtained, I have still my doubts, unless the interest be higher than the last; John Jacob Astor is here, no doubt to attend to the loan or a national bank or more probably to both; He saw Mrs Gallatin at Mr. Dallas'; she was well, but rather low spirited he thought.

I am yours sincerely

NATHL MACON.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 22 March 1814

Sir

I believe you will if you have not already repented having ever wrote to me, that you did not receive as many letters from me, as you wished for of late, I have made as strong draft on your patience as the sailor did on the purse of Dr. Hankey; and to tell you a truth, I have often wondered how you or any other friend, could be pleased with my letters, which are more like a coarse hash, than a dish of good bacon and Greens boiled in the same pot, and brought to the table in the same dish.





The bill passed by the Senate to compromise the Yazoo claims, has been under consideration yesterday and to-day; every preliminary question has been decided in favor of the compromise. if decided before adjournment, you shall have the result.

I suppose you are so much engaged in the performance of the several duties attached to your several stations, that you cannot spare a moment to think of any one, that your whole mind is absorbed with the Bench, the camp and the bank, take notice I do not complain, but on the contrary am rather surprised how you can attend to and perform to the satisfaction of all concerned so many various duties; and I ought to tell [you] how much I should be gratified to see you at the head of your military command, I am sure your movements, would be equal to that of any Virginian, and a stranger might take you for one.

Jones I think is daily gaining friends by his judicious management of the navy Department. I know that some who once thought little of his talents, now consider him, the most usefull member of the administration, and declare that his department was never so well filled before, and that it is a misfortune to the nation that he was not there sooner.

Cheves is an excellent speaker & besides has a fine family, & withall a good fellow.

Yours most truly

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N. Baltimore.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 1 Feby 1815

Sir

I live at Mrs. Clark's in F. street not far east of the burnt treasury office. Rhea of Tennessee, Hall of Georgia, Roane



[Jno] & Burwell of Virginia, & Franklin of N. C. make up the mess, [Meshach Franklin]. The house is about middling and I can, I believe, get a bed put in my room for you, if you should visit the city; let me know a day before hand, that the room may [be] fixed.

Jonathan did not love David, more than I have Randolph, and I still have that same feeling toward him; but somehow or other I am constrained from saying [anything] about it or him, unless now & then to defend him, against false accusations, or what I believe to be such; There is hardly any evil, that afflicts one [more] than the loss of a friend, especially when not conscious of having given any cause for it; I can not account for the coldness, with which you say he treated you or his not staying at your house while in Baltimore. Stanford now and then comes to where I sit in the house, and shows me a letter from R. to him, which is all I see from him, he has not wrote to me since he left Congress nor I but once to him, which was to enclose him a book of his, that I found in the city, when I came to the next session.

I have said this much in answer to your letter, and it is more than has been said or written to any other person.

God bless you and yours.

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N. Baltimore.

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 14 Dec 1827

Sir

Sir, I have been quite unwell for the three last nights. I must therefore ask you to excuse me from my promise to dine with [you] on next Sunday. I am with great respect &c

N. M.



**JEFFERSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON To THOS. JEFFERSON.

Washington 7 Jany 1816

Sir

The Legislature of North Carolina has ordered a full size statue of General Washington of the best marble and workmanship to be procured and set up in the Capitol of the state. The Governor who is authorized to carry the order into execution, has requested me to ascertain whether one worthy the character [it] is to represent and the state which erects it, can be made in the United States, and the sum that it will probably cost, if it cannot be got in this country, the best means of getting one from Italy, the time it may require and the probable cost there.

Relying on your known and uniform willingness to give such information, whenever it has been asked, I have ventured to trouble you on this subject, with which I am entirely unacquainted, It is proper that I should state to you, that it is my intention, to transmit the answer you may give to the Governor.

That the evening of your life may be as happy as the meridian has been useful, is the sincere prayer of

Sir

Your unfeigned friend

&amp; Hble Sevt

NATHL MACON.

"reced Jan 21"

**JAS. H. NICHOLSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON To JOS. H. NICHOLSON.

Washington 15 Decr 1816

Sir

Yesterday I received your very acceptable letter of the day before. If Congress shall adjourn long enough at Christmas





for me to visit you without neglecting my duty, I will use my best exertions to dine with you the 25 instant, Christmas day; permit me to say explicitly & plainly that I would rather be with you and your family alone, than with any others, because then I think we should all be more free; perhaps it is wrong for me to mention it, but there are but very few to whom I could use such friendly language & to no one can it be used more freely than to yourself.

I rejoice with unspeakable joy at your recovery, habit makes any manner of living agreeable & when health depends on living in the very best manner; that is plain; it ought to be the way, we should live; but pride, vain pride multiplieth food of the plain kind, into such a variety of forms and taste, that a plain respectable countryman; who hath enough to eat & to spare hardly knoweth the flesh of the beef or of any other animal, when he happens by chance to be at the table of the rich in a commercial city; so much has cooking changed in a few years; that he scarcely knows the name of one dish, if he scarcely knows beef, how will he find out the new fashioned pies, puddens & c c; Doctor Thornton's gimcracks would not bother him more, nor make him sweat half so freely; there is an aristocracy in every thing but down right work; the rich cannot bear that the food of the poor should be cooked or dressed like theirs, nor that they should use the same words to convey the same meaning, nor that clothes should be cut in the same fashion hence the constant change in all these and many other things which concern the great family of mankind. Do not judge from this that I am unwilling that those who have the means of getting good things should not have them I only object to this universal change, which constantly exerts itself to separate the more fortunate class of society from the less fortunate; I have without design I assure you run into this political morality, having done so, you will have it to read; like all other old folks, I think the politics of former days better than those present,



and that every change of fashion which tends to separate farther the rich and the poor has a strong tendency to aristocracy, and that these changes will if they have not already, tend to give a wide construction to the constitution of the U. S. in fact to make it unlimited by degrees & without a regular amendment, in the proper & constitutional method; in no other way it seems to me, can any one account for the great and almost universal change which has taken place in that which is now called republican politics; they have done that with approbation, which their opponents could not do, with approbation, fashion has enabled them to do it; and fashion will probably enable them going forward till it [changes], but if she be pursued; the current will not leave them; Even religion itself is not entirely free from the influence of the tyrant, fashion, Enough of this, which you will think wild notions, and strange opinions.

God bless you and all your household.

NATHL MACON.

J. H. N. Baltimore.

NATHANIEL MACON To W. H. CRAWFORD.<sup>11</sup>

Buck Spring 13 Octr 1817

Sir

I have received your letter of the 3— instant, with 3 sorts of wheat enclosed, one of the red kind Mr. Somerville was desirous of trying in his garden, I gave it to him, the other I intend to get Mr. Eaton to try, the white I propose to try in my collard patch; I am thankful for them, & so I think I expressed myself for the Luspennella seed; I shall put them on 3 plantations to prevent their mixing, which they might do in my patch; I did not think you would scold at me for my last letter; I will try however to be more on my Ps. and Qs. when writing to the Capital of the U. S. So far from producing a

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<sup>11</sup>Furnished by Prof. U. B. Phillips, Tulane University.



scold, I expected nothing less than to see some thing in the N. [ational] I. [ntelligencer], like proposals for establishing a society to encourage and promote the examination and cultivation of American plants and grasses; nay I was almost certain that the P. of the U. S., Vice P. and heads of departments would be members and Presidents, and thought it quite probable that Adams, Jefferson & Madison would be elected members without being consulted; and that Clay after all the Ghent publications were ended might spare time to be a member. Notwithstanding my expectations were so much disappointed, I cannot say that I repent having written the letter; I still believe in the correctness of the sentiments there advanced, indeed I saw in Governor Milledge's garden near Augusta a native grass, which looked well and of which he spoke well, he promised me some seed.

It is very true that my land and that which my cousin sold is not of the rich kind, and it is equally true, that the land from the Scull Shoals on the Oconee to Lexington has some sour [?] wood on it, but I have nothing against Georgia, I like the people. My cousin has bought land, which produces 125 bushels of corn to the acre; a spare thin man can scarcely walk through a field.

Much do I wish that the public debt could be paid in a few years, it is an old opinion with me, that our strength is in proportion to the smallness of our taxes, encumber and overload us with debt, and we are ruined; but I will not consent to permanent taxes, to be bargained & scuffled for in Congress, and by this means go into the Presidential election. If by the first of next Jany 20,000,000\$ of the debt could be paid, it would sound well all the world over, and make we the people feel well.

One word on another interesting subject, is it not time that foreign currency should cease to be a legal tender, it is a great inconvenience to those who want specie; the banks pay the





meanest thing they have, if the time is come, the law ought to be repealed, if not the mint abolished, think of this.

Remember me in all good will to Mrs. Crawford and the family, believe me your friend.

NATHL. MACON.

Pray tell Mr. Dawson that I have received his letter, and expect to lodge with him, provided a mess can be formed; it is a pity that he has so many rooms in a house.

N. M.

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**JEFFERSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOS. JEFFERSON.

Washington 4 Jany, 1819

Sir

I have received and read with great pleasure the proceedings and report of the commissioners for the University of Virginia: To improve the rising generation is a duty to God, the country and ourselves, those who do most toward it, deserve best of the nation; What man or what talents now in existence, can pretend to limit the progress of the human mind: Improvement in the United States have brought machines to do almost every thing but speak; and surely other branches of useful knowledge may be carried to the same perfection.

Will you permit me, to take this opportunity to state to you, that I have for some time past thought much of writing to you, to ask you to inform me, for I know of no one else which could, how it happens that all the meanness which turned the federalists out have been and are now the fashion; I have not done so, because it might be that you were over done with letters, and did not wish to touch politics; I stop the pen and smother my inclination, to prevent another which might be disagreeable.



Accept my warm thanks for your kind remembrance, and my sincere wishes that the remainder of your useful life, may be as easy and pleasant to yourself as the past has been beneficial to our country, and believe me to be your friend

N. M.

Thos. Jefferson Esq.

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Washington 28 Feby 1819

Sir

Doctor Hall a friend of mine, one of the Representatives of North Carolina, brought with him to this place, a few bottles of Scuppernong wine, the best American, that I have tasted: I asked for two to send you, which he willingly gave and regretted, that application had not been sooner made, that more might have been sent: Our friend Governor Barbour has kindly offered to contrive them to you. Accept them as a small mark of the great esteem entertained for you by

Your friend

N. M.

Thos. Jefferson.

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Washington 11 Feby 1820

Sir

A gentleman of North Carolina is now engaged, in writing its history, he is very desirous to obtain information about its first settlement, & officers, until the revolution; It has occurred to me that it was possible, that you could furnish much information, which no other person now living could, under this belief, I take the liberty, to request you to favor me, with such



as you may think proper, for his use; I beg leave to assure you, that I would not thus trouble you, did I believe it would be got from any other person.

I am with great truth

Your friend & obt. sevt,

NATHL MACON.

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

[Buck Springs Oct. 20, 1821]

Sir

I did not receive your letter of the 19 ultimo untill yesterday, it had no doubt been at Warrenton some time: but I live twelve miles from it and seldom go there.

The letter<sup>12</sup> with the copy of the enclosed will not be seen by any person during my life, without your direction, though I incline to the opinion, that much good might be done, by a few well tried friends reading them; If I should live longer than you, am I to be understood, that after your death, you now have no objection to their publication, then, this is my impression, and without being advised to the contrary, will be done; They will be immediately put under cover and sealed, directed to a friend, remain in my possession, to be delivered after my death, and not to be opened during your life.

Will you pardon my stating to you, that I have long thought, many of the letters written to you, were written by persons who either knew or had heard of your candor and frankness, and calculated that the answer might possibly be made useful to them or their friends in their private affairs, & often mentioned to some of our Virginia friends that I wished, they would communicate the opinion to you, in the most easy and friendly manner; Nothing prevented my doing it but the great aversion, I knew you had to being plagued with letters, besides I thought

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<sup>12</sup>Jefferson's Writings, vol. xii 206-208 (Ford's Fed. ed.) for reference to this letter.





it rather too forward to write to you about your private concerns, and it seemed not unlike, the frog trying to equal the ox.

No one thinks higher of the two books written by Colo. Taylor than I do. I however almost fear, it is too late for them to do the great majority of the people good; too many persons have lived so long so well on the public debt and Bank stock and by bank and other swindling, that it will be almost impossible for the honesty and the industry of the nation to get clear of them; the news papers are generally on the paper and idle side, and they are generally as much depreciated as the bank-bills.

I mentioned to you in a letter some years past, that the principles which turned the federalists out of power, were not fashionable at Washington, nor is there much probability of their being shortly; for two years past, the U. S. have borrowed money in time of peace, to keep their vessels cruising on every sea, and to pay an army; but G. Britain does the same; and if we continue to follow her example, debt, taxes and grinding the poor are the certain consequences.

After it was known that President Madison, one of our best and most worthy men, would sign the act, to establish the expensive bank of the U. S.; all who were tired of the principles which put them into power; immediately laid them aside, and went farther into constructive and implied powers, than had been done at any time before; new converts always go beyond those who held the opinions before them; believe me I have not mentioned Mr. Madison, with an intent to injure him; and if I was disposed to do so, I could not calculate to proceed with you, no man respects him more than I do; but the errors of a great and good man often do much mischief.

I am almost ashamed of the length of this letter and yet it requires an exertion to stop, whenever one of the few who maintain the old and safe principles writes to me; I fear that I am apt to make the answer too long and perhaps tedious; that the



evening of your life may be as happy as the morning has been  
useful to your country is the sincere wish of your friend

NATHL MACON.

Th. Jefferson.

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**MACON PAPERS.**

THOMAS JEFFERSON TO NATHANIEL MACON

Monticello Oct. 10, 1823

Dear Sir:

The bearer Doctor Watkins has for some time been my neighbor and family physician, and in the latter character particularly has deserved much of my self and personally age and accident have given me much occasion for aid in that line, his political principles are yours and mine; and proposing a visit to Washington he naturally wishes to be known to one so long and so prominent in the school of genuine republicanism, I recommend him to your acquaintance as one whose worth and responsibility and correctness of character render him truly estimable; and I do it with the more pleasure as it gives me the occasion of recalling myself to your recollection and of assuring you that time has not changed nor ever will change towards you my constant affection and friendly attaint and respect.

TH. J.

Nathl. Macon.

NATHANIEL MACON TO GOV. TURNER, OF N. C.<sup>13</sup>

Washington 22 Decbr. 1823

Sir

Since being here I have written only once to you; every time I see Crawford who is still very low and mends very slow; he

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<sup>13</sup>Copy of original in possession of Miss Nellie Irby, Nottoway County, Va.



enquires after you in the most friendly manner; Lloyd of Maryland & Lloyd of Mass. have asked after you, more often than all the others senators now of your acquaintance now and then enquire after you; King of N. York as often as any except the two Lloyds.

I continue to think Crawford, has the best chance to be the next president of the named candidates; though I understand there is uncommonly great *shy hogging* against him.

The message of the president, goes rather to far from home; for the information I have seen; what the president may have I do not know.

The Tariff & internal improvement men are in high spirits; let the last have money & they are satisfied; & the first will no doubt be content, to prohibit the importation of articles; which they manufacture or wish to manufacture; Let the government give one money & prohibit importation for the other; then they will cease to complain; then too the tillers of the earth will be Gibionites to them; provided the banks will surrender their claim to them.

Randolph often talks about you, & constantly expresses his regard for you & I am extremely anxious to be informed how you are & how you have been since I left home.

Your friend

NATHL MACON.

Gov. Turner of N. C.

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### JEFFERSON MSS.

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Washington 2 Feby 1822

Sir

Your letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of last November was received soon after my arrival at this place. The answer has been delayed,

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<sup>a</sup>This letter not in any of the Macon collections known to the editor.





under the belief, that the meeting of Congress would add greatly to the number of your correspondents, and that it would be more acceptable, to wait till you had got clear of them.

The plan of the federal court, seems to be to keep pace with Congress, The decisions do not go beyond, the system of internal improvements, which has often been before the National Legislature and received the sanction of both branches, As Congress attempt to get power by stretching the constitution to fit its views, it is to be expected, if other departments do not check the attempt, that each of them, will use the same means to obtain power, and thus destroy any check, that was intended by the division of power into three distinct and separate bodies: The Legislative, Executive and the Judicial; The great principle of the American governments is election for short periods; yet in most of them, it has been departed from in the Judiciary; this is attempting to mix principles, which cannot be united, that is to make men by the tenure of office, independent and upright, who are not so from nature or principle; The tenure of good behavior is a violation of the elective principle, it remains to be determined whether governments uniting two opposite principles will go on smoothly; Again in many of these a check is intended by having two branches in the legislature generally elected by the same electors, some requiring one qualification and some another for the elector, but not one of them seem to me, to have followed the law of nature, in the requisite for the elector or the elected, in some advances have been made toward it; That two branches are necessary in the legislature is not doubted, and that they ought to be elected for short periods, and that the Executive should not be elected for a longer period than the legislature, and Judges, ought not to hold their office during good behavior, but for a fixed time; but with great deference to the opinions of others; a plan will be stated, which has not, that I know off, been tried, it is this, Let the most numerous branch of the legislature be elected by all the whites of the



age of 21 years except paupers, Lunatics, and those who have committed crime, and every elector be eligible, let the other branch be elected by the same sort of people above a given age; every elector as in the other case to be eligible, The age for this branch ought not to be less than 30 years, perhaps forty would be better; The right to vote for both branches would depend on age and moral character; The object to let every man have a part in the government, and one branch at an age beyond youthful heat. Pardon my troubling you, with my small thoughts on this great subject, it is more pleasing to communicate them, than the doings of others, which have not been approved. I fear we are approaching the state, the Israelites were in a few years after the death of Joshua.

This letter is much longer than I expected when I began, yet was I to follow my feelings it would be longer: I know you do not wish to increase the number of your correspondents and I would be the last man in the world to give you trouble, but while I live I shall remain

Your friend

NATHL MACON.

NATHANIEL MACON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Washington 21 May 1824

Sir

The acts for the banks of the United States, the tariff and internal improvements seem to have put an end to legislating on the old republican principles and to prove, that under any party name, unconstitutional measures may be adopted, names may please, but without the principles, which ought to attach to them, they are useless or worse; The acts above mentioned, and such as may be expected to follow tend I fear, to make Congress rather bargainers and traders than sound and fair legislators; to look forward, cannot be pleasing, especially to



those who have been opposed to constructive & implied powers in the federal government. Bank notes if they deserve that name, have introduced a system of speculative swindling, which has no doubt, had some effect in leading to measures, not finally considered to be within the power of the government, by the party now supposed by many people to be in authority.

I have written this much because I could not consent to enquire after your health, without a few words on our affairs; that your days may be many & happy is the most sincere & constant wish of

Sir, Yr friend & obt sevt,

N. M.

### MACON PAPERS.

GEORGE M. TROUP <sup>15</sup> TO NATHANIEL MACON.

Milledgeville, June 15 1824

Dear Sir

Our friends begin to feel uneasy about Mr. Crawford. They fear that his disease may prove fatal or otherwise disqualify him for the office which we so much hoped to see him fill. In this unfortunate event I know of no person who would unite so extensively the public sentiments of the Southern Country in his favor as yourself. In such an unhappy result therefore unless you forbid it I will take the liberty to propagate my opinion as diffusely as I can. In the administration of the general Government we want virtue, virtue, virtue

Your friend

G. M. TROUP.

Nathl Macon.

<sup>15</sup>Troup was one of the ardent States Rights leaders who played an important role in the controversies of Georgia and the Federal Government 1820 to 1827.





NATHANIEL MACON TO BARTLETT YANCEY.<sup>16</sup>

Washington Dec 1825

Sir

Your letter of the 18 instant has been received. I am truly glad to find things going on so well in the General Assembly & hope when it adjourns, that it may deserve and receive thanks of all good people; The evil of depreciated bank paper is beyond calculation, it enables debts to be paid with less than was due & injures the morality of those who are unfortunately compelled to use it [torn]

It is very probable that the proposed message of the president about the Creek treaty will produce a very warm debate. I have not seen all the correspondence between the government of the U. S. and that of Georgia on the subject, of course have no fixed opinion; That an Indian treaty was ever made without presents to particular chiefs I do not believe, That the fact must be known to the administration would seem clear because the instructions for all negotiations ought to be in some of the departments; on what ground the executive intends to bottom the message I have not heard: It is reported and it is stated on report only, that the friends of the late Genl. McIntoch, Indians who are [torn] appear to despair & that of the killing party seem to be in high spirits.

It seems somewhat strange that the federal Government, should be able to acquire so much land from the Indians to the West & North west & so little to the South; & South west; Georgia claims of her to fulfil the bargain made many years since, & no other state or territory has a bargain, by which to claim the extinction of the Indian title; The bargain with her, has not been more respected than was the cession act of North Carolina, the claimants of land in Tennessee under N. C. were

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<sup>16</sup>For other information about Yancey see the Sprunt manuscripts, University of North Carolina.



ousted by a legislative act passed by Cong. which ought to be considered a bargain rather than a law, to which Tenn. & the U. S. were the sole parties. The Indian title to the Connecticut reserve in the State of [Ohio] has long since been extinguished, though that was private property, having been sold by the State to a company.

This question has been put to several lawyers—Could a black from San Domingo or the new continental governments in America, be a witness against a white, in a State where the laws did not permit the black to give testimony against a white, to which no satisfactory answer has yet been obtained.

You wish me to write often, you know how little there is to write, that may not be seen in every newspaper, & there is at Milton a very good one—to write what every one knows is irksome to the writer & tiresome to the reader, it is words and nothing else, it may suit pompous but not plain folks.

It would gratify me very much to be again under your hospitable roof, to see the Madam & all your children; Rufus I saw at the University, but he did not make himself known to me, I immediately found him out, I believe I have before mentioned this to you.

I do not recollect any circumstance or fact worth notice, and I am not from the right part of the Union to have a talent for guessing; so it is uncertain, whether more can be added. I will stop a while, to try to find something to fill the paper, it is grog time, perhaps a drink may assist me. Egg nog was prepared last night & this morning, but I did not taste it, good it was said to be and was tempted to try it.

Taken the grog, eat dinner, & add that I believe this administration, will by the help of patronage be able to carry most of its plans. The Senate of late years, has been the check on executive power.

Saunders I expect writes to you very often perhaps once a week, as I do not go about, nor do I know that he does, I can



not give the news which circulates at the city (s — — e s) nor at Mrs. Adams house. The more knowing ones.—[torn out] no doubt these talk of great matters & are prepared to retail them to the first patient company, who would rather hear than speak.

Now I wish to you and Mrs. Yancey & to all your family a merry Christmas & a happy new year and many of them, and all the good things which the negroes usually wish their Masters and Mistresses at this season of the year and farewell to you all, & believe me

Your friend

NATHL MACON.

Bartlett Yancey.

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**JEFFERSON MSS.**

NATHANIEL MACON To THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Washington 14 Jan. 1826

Sir

Permit me to introduce to your acquaintance & attention, my much esteemed friend and relative Judge Henry Seawell of Raleigh, who will hand you this, he is a worthy man of the old republican school in politics; & will I am sure receive your kind civilities, which will add another to the many obligations already conferred. He will take a son with him, who he is anxious to place in the Virginia University, & I am desirous. that the son should be made acquainted with you, for whom I have long entertained the highest esteem & the most profound respect. If it should so happen that the Judge, should not visit Charlottesville, this will be delivered to you by his son





William, when he shall apply for admission into the University. He is a graduate of our University.

Accept the assurance of the continued good will and esteem  
of your friend

NATHL MACON.

Thomas Jefferson.

### MACON PAPERS.

NATHANIEL MACON TO GIDEON ALSTON.<sup>17</sup>

Washington Jany 9. 1828.

Since being here, I have not heard from you, nor been informed whether you received the note of hand, which Nat M Martin paid with the money you put in his possession for the purpose, he Nat done all you requested, & I forwarded you the note some time since.

Judging from what I hear, it is more than probable that Jackson will be elected the next president.

No news worth telling. Congress have done nothing, & I hope will not do much unless by repealing the tariff laws & this I am sure will not be done.

Tell Gideen I often think of him & wish him well; & assure all your family of the good will & esteem of

Yr friend & kinsman

NATHL MACON.

NATHANIEL MACON TO NORTH CAROLINA ASSEMBLY.

Buck Spring 14 Nov. 1828

Gentlemen:

Age and infirmity render it proper for me to retire from public service, I therefore resign the appointment of Senator

<sup>17</sup>Copy furnished Thos. M. Pittman, Henderson, N. C.



to the Senator of the U. S., that of Trustee of the University of the State, and that of Justice of the Peace for the County of Warren.

In retiring from the service of the State, I want words to convey to the Legislature and through them to the people my thanks and gratitude for their kindness and the confidence reposed in me. There are feelings which words cannot express, mine are of the kind. I may however be permitted to add, that no person can be under more obligations to a State, than I am to North Carolina, nor feel them more strongly, and that duty alone, has induced me to resign.

I am Gentlemen

With utmost respect & esteem

NATHL MACON

Gen. Assembly, Raleigh, N. C.

"While<sup>18</sup> at Princeton New Jersey in 1776 I served a short tour of militia duty, after the fall of Charleston S. C. (12 May 1780) I served in the militia till the preliminary articles of peace were signed (30 Nov. 1782) & never received or charged a cent for militia duty anywhere—I never solicited any man to work for me, or hinted to him, that I wished him to do so, nor did I ever solicit any person to make interest, for me, to be elected to any place.

When elected to the U. S. Senate; I did not receive double pay for travelling.

Twice offered the office of post Master General—Speaker of the House of R. 3 times successively 1801-1807.

BEDFORD BROWN TO NATHANIEL MACON.

Washington City 29 April 1830

Dear Sir

Your favor of the 10 Inst. was duly received and I owe you an expression of my thanks for your kindness in writing me,

<sup>18</sup>In Macon's handwriting on back of this paper to the Legislature.



as any thing from the pen of a Fellow Citizen so large a share of whose life has been devoted to the service of his country, and the correctness of whose political course time is constantly affording the most ample testimony in favor of, could not be otherwise than grateful to my feelings.

The speedy payment of the national debt, referred to in your letter should be an object of unceasing solicitude, with all who wish to see the government brought to its republican course, for so long as it remains unpaid, it will form a pretext for continuing the present high rates of duties; thus annually exacting from Agricultural industry a large sum of money, which a wise and provident government, should leave in the pockets of its citizens. If this course is persevered in, and it should become the settled policy of Congress after the national debt is extinguished, to continue a system of taxation, which will annually bring into the Treasury a larger sum than the ordinary expenditure of government require, it cannot but be looked on with dismay and apprehension, by those who are friendly to preserving the limitations, which the framers of the constitution designed to impose on the federal government, but which have been almost entirely disregarded by a combination of selfish politicians, who have succeeded in establishing, what they falsely denominate the "American System"! by which extortions are to be practiced on a portion of the people of the confederacy, to be expended in distant states in which those who contribute the largest amount of money, have no immediate interest. A system more false to the prosperity of the Southern portion of America, better calculated to annihilate the sovereignty of the States, and destroy the peace and harmony of the Union, could not in my opinion have been devised: it has caused our Government in theory the best which history furnishes an account of, to become in its practical effects, oppressive on a large portion of its citizens, and by the douceurs, which it holds out to its citizens by appropriations, for internal improvements, a spirit of cupidity is excited among them, of a corrupting tendency,





and which leads to their acquiescence, in the usurpation of the Gen. Govt., but of this, enough! for with the motives which influenced the political schemes, to whom we are indebted for this system and the destructive influence which it is exerting on the prosperity and freedom of our country, no one is better acquainted than yourself.

The Bill authorizing the President to exchange with certain Indian tribes, lands west of the Mississippi, for those now occupied by them, and making an appropriation for their removal in the event of their consent to do so, passed the Senate a few days since (as you will have seen by the papers before this) and it is believed will pass the House of Representatives. On yesterday Mr. McDuffie continued in the H. of R. the speech which he commenced on the day before in support of his amendment to Mr. Mallory's Bill for the more faithful collection of the public revenue. Mr. McDuffie's amendment, which I have out of the U. Intelligencer is enclosed. His speech in support of it was one of great power and is said to have produced some effect on some of those in favor of the protecting policy, though, I have but little hope if a reduction of the duties at this session except on tea, coffee, and perhaps on salt. In the Senate we make but slow progress, the opposition party have left no effort unessayed, to embarrass the measures of the administration at every step. This has been the case, more especially in executive business, as we have on several occasions sat six or seven hours at a time without having acted on more than one or two nominations. The nomination of Kendall has not yet been acted on. it probably will be in the course of the present week and it is extremely doubtful whether it will be confirmed. The time when Congress will adjourn is yet uncertain as there is much business of importance still to be acted on and should the Senate try the impeachment of Judge Peck at the present session, which is probable (as a communication was yesterday received from him intimating a wish to be tried) it will, I fear, be near the first of June before the session terminates. I fear Sir, I



have trespassed on your time by the length of my letter and will conclude by tendering you my earnest wishes for your health and happiness.

Very respectfully your obt. svt.

B. BROWN.

Nathaniel Macon Esq.

NATHANIEL MACON TO SAMUEL P. CARSON.<sup>19</sup>

Buck Spring, 9. Feb. 1833

Sir: I have received your letter of the 24 ultimo. There can be no doubt that the U. S. are in a deplorable situation, and that the publication of the opinion you desire would be useless. It has never been a secret and always stated to those who wanted to know it. In the year 1824 the constitution was buried in the Senate. The opinions of gen. Washington, Mr. Jefferson and gov. Clinton are known but not respected. I have never believed a state could nullify and remain in the union, but have always believed that a state might secede when she pleased, provided she would pay her proportion of the public debt, and this right I have considered the best guard to public liberty and to public justice that could be desired, and it ought to have prevented what is now felt in the south—oppression.

“The proclamation contains principles as contrary to what was the constitution as nullification. It is the great error of the administration, which, except that, has been satisfactory in a high degree, to the people who elected the president. When confederacies begin to fight liberty is soon lost, and the government is soon changed. A government of opinion established by sovereign states, for special purposes, cannot be maintained by force. The use of force makes enemies, and enemies cannot live in peace under such a government.

The case of South Carolina is as different one from that of Pennsylvania as any two cases can be. In 1816 the system that

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<sup>19</sup>From Niles Register 44, 418.



now oppresses the south was begun. It was then opposed. In 1824 the constitution was buried. Senators who were then in the Senate, will no doubt recollect—(Repetition—old age will show)—Time to quit,                      Yours, very truly

NATHL MACON

Samuel P. Carson Esq of N. C.

Late U. S. Senator.

MARTIN VAN BUREN TO NATHANIEL MACON.

Washington Feby 13, 1836

My dear Sir

The enclosed letters will show you the steps I have taken in regard to the picture, which has I hope before this time come to light, or rather to your hands. I have taken the liberty of showing your letter to the President who feels himself complimented by the preference you have been pleased to give to Mr. Braggs (work), and desires to be affectionately remembered to you. Allow me to add on my own account that I feel myself highly honored to have my name introduced into your family, & sincerely hope it may some day be in my power to be serviceable to the youth who bears it. I think I may safely say to you that the French business will be (certainly?) and satisfactorily settled with an increase of reputation abroad of the strength of the administration at home. The abolition question has received its quietus in the House, will be treated in like manner in the Senate & the States, so as to put it out of the power of evil disposed persons to disturb the harmony of our happy Union through its agency. Assuring you of the great pleasure it will always give me to hear from you I am

Dear Sir

Very truly yours

M. VAN BUREN.

Washington Feby 13, 1836.

Nathaniel Macon Esq.





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Historical Papers  
OF  
RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

Published Annually by the Department of History

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	- - - - -	97
EDMUND RUFFIN—HENRY G. ELLIS	- - - -	99
DR. W. H. RUFFNER—E. L. FOX	- - - -	124
GEN. ROBT. B. TAYLOR—W. B. ELLIOTT	- - -	145

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JUNE, 1910

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PREFACE

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The Branch Papers this year present biographies of Edmund Ruffin, Dr. William Henry Ruffner and Gen. Robert B. Taylor. The importance of these men in Virginia history would justify fuller biographies than these here given, but it is hoped that the results of these pieces of research may prove useful to students of Virginia history. Gen. Taylor was a prominent Federalist during practically the whole of the period from 1789 to 1816 when that party was influential in Virginia. Edmund Ruffin was the ablest and most influential of Virginia's agricultural leaders during a period of thirty years immediately preceding the Civil War. He was the author of a celebrated essay on calcareous manuring; he was also an ardent pro-slavery advocate and an apostle of secession. Dr. William H. Ruffner's activities belong to the Reconstruction period. He is the father of Virginia's public free school system.

The Branch Papers for 1911 will contain one or two short biographies of prominent Virginians and a large part of the unpublished correspondence of Thomas Ritchie, editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*.

CHAS. H. AMBLER



## EDMUND RUFFIN: HIS LIFE AND TIMES.\*

BY HENRY G. ELLIS.

"And he gave it for his opinion, 'that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together.'"

The thirty years immediately preceding the great Civil War were years of political unrest. After the so-called "Era of Good-feeling," an issue pushed itself forward that was to rise above and eclipse all other national political issues. In spite of all the efforts at pacification and compromise the chasm between the North and the South on the economic and political problem of negro slavery was constantly widening and deepening.

The South was united with its proverbial solidity to oppose the efforts of emancipators and abolitionists. The difference was not one that could be settled at the ballot box, and Cobb, of Georgia, spoke with more truth and foresight than he was probably aware of, when, in the debates over the Missouri compromise, he said to the anti-slavery men: "You have kindled a fire which all the waters of the ocean cannot put out and which seas of blood only will extinguish." † While it was true that the South, as opposed to the North, stood solid on the question of negro slavery, it was also true that, in the South itself there was a division, clear and well-defined, between those who staunchly defended slavery as a divine institution, an economic good and necessity, and those who apologized for it as an evil, a burden on the country, the sooner rid of the better.

Of the political leaders of this time, much has been written and the work of the Clays, the Calhouns, the Websters, the Yanceys, the Davises, the Douglasses, has been more or less thoroughly threshed out. But there was another class of men, the industrial leaders, whose opinions did much to mold the

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\*Awarded the Bennett History Medal, 1909.

† *Annals of Congress*, 15 Cong. 2 Sess., 1., 1204.





thought of the great masses of people and to bring on the "irrepressible conflict." Of these industrial leaders little is known and their work, not being accomplished in the limelight of political publicity, is often unappreciated and its significance not understood. A type of these leaders is Edmund Ruffin, of Virginia. To get a proper understanding of him, he must be studied as an economist, a leader in agricultural improvement, who, during his many years of usefulness, probably did more for the farming element of the South, and of Virginia in particular, than any other man, either before or since his day. Incidentally he was a publicist, a pro-slavery leader, a defender of minority rights and a rank secessionist.

It is said that when a man becomes prominent in New York, people ask: "How much is he worth?", in Boston: "What does he know?" With a great deal of truth it may be added that in Virginia they ask: "Who was his grandfather? What is his pedigree?" This is to a large extent true to the present day and was truer in those days that preceded the conflict of 1860.

Edmund Ruffin came of good stock. His grandfather was "Edmund Ruffin, fourth in descent from Wm. Ruffin, who was seated in the Isle of Wight county in 1666, and died in 1693. He was the son of Edmund Ruffin by his first marriage with Mrs. Edmunds, *nee* Simmons, (he married secondly Elizabeth Cocke, of Surry County) and was born January 2, 1744 or 1745, and died in 1807; was a member of the House of Delegates 1777, 1784, 1786 and 1787; County Lieutenant 1789; Sheriff 1797; married Jane, daughter of Sir William Skipwith, Bar't., of Prestwood, Mecklenburg County.\*" To this union was born, in 1765, a son, George, who married Rebecca Cocke. A son of this union was Edmund Ruffin, the subject of this sketch, born January 5, 1794, in Prince George County, Virginia.† The Edmund Ruffin referred to above, the grandfather of Edmund

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\* *Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, (n. s.) X., 380.

† *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, V., 74. Accounts of Mr. Ruffin may be found in *DeBow's Review*, XI., 431-436; *Yearbook*, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1895, 493-502; and *The American Farmer*, 1852, VII.



Ruffin, the secessionist, was a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1788 and, while he made no speeches in the convention, it is interesting to note that his votes show that he sided with Grayson, Patrick Henry, Mason, and those other great advocates of the rights of the individual states.† Thus, even before our Federal Constitution was adopted, he was defending the rights of the states as did his eminent grandson in the two decades immediately preceding the Civil War. Mr. Ruffin's father, George Ruffin, was not prominent as a public man; but as a Virginian planter he remained true to the traditions of his ancestors and reared his son in the states' rights school.

Of Mr. Ruffin's early life little is known. It has been stated that he was impeded in his work by a feeble constitution.\* If this be true the work he later accomplished seems the more wonderful, for his was a busy and useful life. His father, being comparatively wealthy, was able to give him the advantages of a good education and, when he arrived at the age of sixteen, he was entered at the famous William and Mary College, the *alma mater* of Jefferson, John Taylor of Caroline, and others of like stamp. The records of the college for this time have been destroyed and we can, therefore, learn nothing of Mr. Ruffin's college career. It has been stated, however, that his connection with the institution proved unprofitable and that he was suspended for continuous neglect of duty.† It is not improbable that the sudden change from a country plantation to life in a college town developed in the young man a tendency to sow his wild oats and the above statement is doubtless true. When the second war with Great Britain came on he enlisted in the first muster of soldiers in August, 1812, and served, as a private, until February, 1813, when he returned home to take charge of

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† Elliot's *Debates on the Federal Constitution*, III., 654, 655, 662.

\* *American Farmer*, VII., 293.

† W. P. Cutter, *A Pioneer in Agricultural Science*, Yearbook, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1895, 494; *The American Farmer*, VII., 293.





an estate at Coggin's Point, Prince George County, which he had inherited from his father.

Thus, when only twenty years of age, he began his remarkable career as a scientific agriculturist. Whether he had made a success as a college student or not, it is certain that any failure to do so was not due to lack of ability as his later works abundantly testify. With the energy and application that was characteristic of all his later undertakings he immediately began to familiarize himself not only with all the practical knowledge of farming but also with the theories of scientific agriculture. He not only familiarized himself with the works of Virginia's two great publicists, John Taylor of Caroline and Thomas R. Dew, but he also read and digested the scientific works of Sir Humphrey Davy, Boussingalt, Liebig, Berzelius and many other scientists of note.

Agriculture at this time in Virginia was at a low ebb.\* Unscientific farming and the nature of the crops cultivated had combined to drain the exuberant soil of its fertility. The settlers of Virginia had planted its fields in tobacco to satisfy the European demand. After years of culture of this crop the European wars created a demand for cereals and the already debilitated acres were planted in wheat. In the midst of an abundance of soil the Virginia farmer had found it easier to break up new land than to improve the old. By the beginning of the nineteenth century nearly all the land of Tidewater, Virginia, had been put into cultivation and as there were no new fields to clear the older ones were, by exhaustive crops and a wasteful system of slave labor, robbed of their fecundity. In the hunt for new land the farmers were, in many instances, leaving the homes of their fathers to start new ones in the fertile west. Prices went down, fences rotted, fields were left uncultivated, and deer and wild turkeys were said to be more abundant around Virginia's ancient capital, Williamsburg, than anywhere in Kentucky. John Randolph, of Roanoke, prophe-

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\*See Lynchburg *Virginian* of July 4, 1833, and other papers of the time.





sied that the time would soon come when the master would flee from the slave and be advertised for in the public papers. Such conditions and the patriotic need of remedying them faced the young planter, Edmund Ruffin.

The Virginia farmer, like the Chinaman, was, and is, inclined to plant his fields and raise his crops in a certain way because his father and grandfather did it that way. With rare originality Mr. Ruffin immediately set to work to devise some means of permanently increasing the fertility of his acres and the returns therefrom. He commenced a set of experiments, keeping careful record of the results of each one, and succeeded in proving to his own satisfaction that a great means of improving exhausted lands was by the application of marl.† The idea was not original with Mr. Ruffin, nor can he be called the first great agricultural leader of Virginia. Marl had been used as a fertilizer for many years in England and as early as the time of Governor Yeardley it had been tried in Virginia.‡ In the very beginning of the nineteenth century John Taylor of Caroline, in his famous pamphlet entitled *Arator*,\*\* had given the farmers of Virginia the soundest advice as to means of improving their land; but Mr. Ruffin was the first to convince the farmers of the value of marl and to get them to use it to any extent. He based his argument not on theory alone but on practical and convincing experiment, and it is no mean comment on his work that, according to the census of 1850, the increase in the value of the lands of eastern Virginia since 1837 amounted to \$23,000,000.00.\* It is not claimed that this was wholly due to Ruffin's work and influence, but there is no other cause to which we can attribute by far the larger part of the increase.

An interesting incident throws some light on Mr. Ruffin's political convictions at this time. Between 1815 and 1825

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† A mixture of clay and carbonate of lime. Deposits of this substance are very numerous in Virginia and of great value as a fertilizer.

‡ P. A. Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia*, I., 427.

\*\* This pamphlet may be had at the Virginia State Library.

\* *American Farmer*, VII.



County Agricultural Societies were being organized throughout the eastern part of the State. These Societies were at first devoted only to the interests of agriculture but they soon became interested in politics. In 1818, Mr. Ruffin was instrumental in forming such an agricultural Society in his county. From several local societies was formed the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia and Mr. Ruffin became its Secretary.† This society, under his direction, presented to Congress in the session of 1819-20, what *DeBow's Review* terms "the first petition ever offered against the protective policy."‡ It was doubtless with reference to Mr. Ruffin's activity at this time that the impetuous Ritchie in a later editorial in the *Richmond Enquirer* said: "He was among the earliest and most enlightened opponents of the abominable Tariff."\*

In 1821 the first published exposition of Mr. Ruffin's agricultural theories and practices appeared in the *American Farmer*,\*\* as an "Essay on the Composition of Soils and their Improvement by Calcareous Manures." This Essay was read before the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia and attracted such attention that it was ordered to be printed. The title of the article implies its character and the Essay shows that it is the result of careful study and experimentation and that the author was well versed in the then young science of agricultural chemistry. It was but the precursor of a long and able series of agricultural works, comprising no less than fifty magazine articles and ten books and pamphlets, not to mention ten years' service as editor of the *Farmer's Register* and numerous purely political books and essays.

In 1823, Mr. Ruffin was elected to the Virginia State Senate for the District composed of Sussex, Surrey, Southampton, Isle of Wight, Prince George and Greensville counties.\*\*\*

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† *American Farmer*, III., 321; *DeBow's Review*, XI., 431.

‡ *DeBow's Review*, XI., 434.

\* *Richmond Enquirer*, July 18, 1833.

\*\* *American Farmer*, III., 313-319.

\*\*\* *Virginia Senate Journals*, 1823-24, 16.





This was his first and only appearance as a public man and he held this office only three years. There is nothing to offer any better explanation of his refusal to serve longer than the following from *DeBow's Review*: "With too much of patriotism and rigid, unbending political principle to be a simple partisan, he ever had but little kindness for either of the great political parties which divide and distract our country. He has freely denounced both when wandering, as he believed, from those principles which should control the government of this confederacy. It can never be said of him, as of Burke, that he to party gave up what was meant for mankind.† As soon as he appeared in the Senate he was appointed on the Committee of Internal Improvements ‡ and continued to serve on this committee as long as he was in that body. Although these three sessions of 1823-24, 1824-25 and 1825-26 were stirring ones in the National Congress, very little legislative work was accomplished in the Virginia Assembly. True to Tidewater, Virginia, Mr. Ruffin consistently opposed any effort to create new counties in the discontented west.\* He was unwilling to see any of the political power of the wealthy eastern minority diminished by increasing the representation of the western part of the Commonwealth. Always an opponent of the banks, as they were then conducted, he opposed all motions to recharter the Farmer's Bank of Virginia, which was first chartered in February, 1812.\*\*

In 1833, Mr. Ruffin started the *Farmer's Register*, "A Monthly Publication Devoted to the Improvement of the Practice and Support of the Interests of Agriculture." The first number of this magazine was cordially welcomed by all interested in agricultural matters. Farmers in general were glad to have this means of learning the opinions of the editor who had already come to be recognized as an authority on agricultural

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† *DeBow's Review*, XI., 434.

‡ *Virginia Senate Journals*, 1823-24, 22.

\* *Ibid.*, 49.

\*\* *Ibid.*, 119 and 123.





matters. The *Richmond Enquirer* in a review of the first issue hailed it as forming a new era for agriculture in Virginia and declared that even the first number had exceeded the most sanguine expectations. This review is accompanied by a sketch of Mr. Ruffin's life which placed him as one of the foremost scientific planters of the South and East.\* The magazine grew in circulation and influence until it was recognized by subscribers from New England to Georgia as one of the ablest of its kind.† It gained for its editor recognition as "one of the most distinguished practical farmers of the ancient Dominion." It took for its motto the saying from Swift quoted at the beginning of this article and it is interesting, as well as surprising, when we consider the temperament of the editor and the time of its publication, to note that all articles of a political nature were absolutely excluded from its pages. This was at a time when politics were warm. A paper that printed the political opinions of one party would hardly be admitted to the homes of some of those of the opposite "persuasion." In order that the *Farmer's Register* might have a wider and better influence in matters agricultural, questions political were not discussed. It was during this period, when Jackson ruled the country with the hand of a master, that the theory of "Minority Rights," which was to be so interpreted as to strengthen the theory of State's Rights and Secession, was developing. Eastern Virginia was then a part of the minority and willingly embraced the doctrine of the Calhoun school. At this time (July, 1837) a toast was proposed by N. Herbermont at a Fourth of July celebration in South Carolina that is worth quoting in full. It is not only evidence of Mr. Ruffin's standing but also throws light on the politics of the time in South Carolina and throughout the entire pro-slavery South, including eastern Virginia. When the time for toasts came, Mr. Herbermont said: "Gentlemen:—We cannot consent to pass over the Fourth of July without drinking some toast. Who is the man now in public

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\* *Richmond Enquirer*, July 18, 1833.

† *Harper's Weekly*, IX., 478; and numerous contemporary reviews.



office or capacity, deserving of having his name thus extolled? Our political affairs are in such a state, that those at the head of them, deserve our most unequivocal disapprobation. Our money and commercial affairs are in such a condition, from the wild and dishonest projects concocted in the kitchen at headquarters for the gratification of the vitiated palates of the magnates of the country, that we cannot, with a clear conscience, estimate any of them sufficiently high to send their names to the world with our commendation and praise. In this dilemma, I propose, gentlemen, to deviate so far from the usual practice of having on this day exclusively political subjects. I propose then, Edmund Ruffin, of Petersburg, Va., the talented and indefatigable editor of the *Farmer's Register* and author of that most interesting and valuable work, 'Essay on Calcareous Manures' \* \* \* \* \* Verily, he deserves our thanks. May our approbation of his virtues and patriotic exertions be as a nucleus for the gratitude which posterity will bear to his name.\*"

In 1835, Mr. Ruffin published in connection with the *Farmer's Register*, his most widely known work,† *An Essay on Calcareous Manures*.‡ This able work ran through five editions and increased in size from a hundred and sixteen pages in 1835, to four hundred and ninety pages in 1852. It is an able and careful work, setting forth in a scholarly and convincing manner the author's ideas concerning the use of Calcareous Manures as a means of restoring impoverished lands. It is divided into two parts. The first, or theoretical part, is a logical argument from a scientific viewpoint, sustained by eminent chemists and agriculturists. The second, or practical part, gives the result of a set of careful and painstaking experiments. The essay deals chiefly with agricultural subjects but makes incidental references to negro

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\* *Southern Agriculturist*, X., 401-402.

† *Southern Agriculturist*, X., 402; *American Journal of Science and Arts*, XXX., 138-163; *Harper's Weekly*, IX., 478.

‡ Copies of this work may be had at the Virginia State Library and at the Library of Congress.



slavery and the domestic slave trade. Of the profits derived from the slave trade the author says: "The cultivators of eastern Virginia derive a portion of their income from a source quite distinct from their tillage—and which, though it often forces them to persist in their profitless farming, yet also in some measure conceals, and is generally supposed to compensate for, its losses. This source is the breeding and selling of slaves; of which (though a discussion of this point will not be undertaken here) I cannot concur in the general opinion that it is also a source of profit.\*"

Mr. Ruffin continued the publication of the *Farmer's Register* for ten years. With each volume the number of subscribers seemed to be increasing and the magazine had become a handbook for the farmers of the East. But in 1842 the editor was forced to stop the publication, because, even with the increased subscription, it was not a financial success. Throughout the whole ten volumes the editor had stuck strictly to his original purpose, that is of publishing matter "devoted to the improvement of the Practice and Support of the Interests of Agriculture." It is true that some contemporary newspaper attacked him for publishing, in the ninth volume of the *Register*, discussions of the Bank Evils. These contemporaries claimed that Mr. Ruffin had not stuck to his declared purpose of excluding political discussions from the columns of the *Register*; but Mr. Ruffin defended his position on the grounds that the subject of Banking was of vital interest and importance to every farmer in the country and that the *Register* was merely discussing the Banks from the standpoint of their utility to the farmer.† So vitally interested did Mr. Ruffin become in this subject that the movement to recharter the United States Bank and the results of the panic of 1837 caused him to enter temporarily the field of National Politics. In September, 1841, he began the publication of the *Bank Reformer*, a monthly pamphlet

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\* *Essay on Calcareous Manures*, Edition of 1842, 22.

† *Farmer's Register*, IX., passim. Contemporary issues of the *Richmond Compiler* and *Petersburg Statesman*.







devoted to the purpose of reforming the existing bank evils. This paper was published for six months and opposed the wild-cat banking in as strong articles as the English language and printers' ink could supply. In addition to the editor's opinions and those of his contemporaries, the writings of Gallatin, Jefferson, Madison, Webster and Clay were searched and whatever they said or wrote against the bank evils was republished in this organ of reform. At this time the editor was instrumental in organizing a "Reform Association," at Petersburg, having the same end in view as the *Bank Reformer*.

But the field of National politics had no charm for Ruffin. The Virginia Legislature, in the session of 1840-41, established a State Board of Agriculture, of which he was made a member. When the Board met for the first time on December 6, 1841, he was elected Secretary, James Barbour being elected President.\* After organizing and arranging plans for a Statewide campaign for agricultural improvements James Barbour was, by authority of the Board, commissioned to prepare an address to the General Assembly, stating the plans of the board and the condition and needs of Virginia. In the course of this address, Barbour writes: "It is with unfeigned regret that the Board feels itself compelled to draw the attention of the Legislature to the condition of the Commonwealth and especially of its eastern portion. Ours is a case unparalleled in the progress of human affairs: a country once fertile, in a most genial climate, with advantages peculiar to ourselves in our numerous and fine navigable streams, and all these blessings under the protection of order and equal laws, becoming depopulated, is a spectacle without its like. Whatever other causes may have contributed to this mournful result, all will readily refer the principal agency therein to an injudicious husbandry. To remove this blighting evil will be the great object of the Board. It does not disguise from itself, however, that, unaided and alone, its efforts will be unavailing. It must have the constant and cordial co-opera-

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\* *Journal of State Board of Agriculture, First Session. Ruffin manuscript papers.*



tion of all classes, and the fostering countenance of the Legislature. Agriculture should be the first object of civilized man; its condition is a fair test of the state of society; when it is defective, all conditions suffer—when it prospers, all partake of its prosperity.”\* This last sentence, from the pen of the able United States Senator, Secretary of War, and Minister to the court of Saint James, may be taken as the keynote of Edmund Ruffin’s career.

In 1842, Mr. Ruffin was made Agricultural Surveyor of the State of South Carolina. This office came entirely without solicitation on his part and was a practical recognition of his ability and accomplishments as an agriculturist, and a proof that his influence had, even at that early date, extended far beyond the boundaries of his own State. Leaving Virginia, he went to South Carolina and fulfilled the duties of his office for one year. In 1843, his *Report of the Commencement and Progress of the Agricultural Survey of South Carolina for 1843* was published. This is a careful and exact account of his work. It makes statements as to the occurrence of marl-beds in the State, contains many statistics and chemical analyses, and makes a plea for more scientific farming and an intelligent use of marl as a fertilizer.

Mr. Ruffin returned to Virginia in 1843 and organized the Virginia State Agricultural Society of which he was elected President. He continued to serve in this capacity for several years.†

About this time he purchased *Marlbourne*, an estate in Hanover County on the Pamunkey River, and late in December commenced to move his effects to that place. On leaving Prince George County, a dinner was given at Garysville in his honor, and his admiring friends and neighbors “in consideration of the distinguished services rendered by him in promoting the agricultural interests of the county by the practical use of

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\* *Ibid.*

† *Yearbook*, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1895, 493. *Harper’s Encyclopaedia of United States History*, VII., 499.



marl as manure and by his Essays on that subject," † presented him with a gift of silverware. At the dinner the guests drank to the toast: "Edmund Ruffin, the Pioneer of Marling, the Author of the *Essay on Calcareous Manures* and Editor of the *Farmers' Register*,—Imperishable Works of genius and industry—We deeply regret his intention to leave us; he carries with him our highest respect for his character and gratitude for his services." ‡

*Marlbourne* is situated on the Pamunkey River, in the Tidewater section of Virginia, the old aristocratic neighborhood of Hanover County. Adjoining it was the plantation of Carter Braxton. Like most of the Tidewater, it had been impoverished by unscientific farming before the time when Mr. Ruffin took possession of it. It contained 977½ acres, 684½ of which were in the low-grounds of the Pamunkey. Improvements on it consisted of a large and valuable dwelling house, kitchen, laundry, meat-house, ice-house, stables, carriage-house, barn, negro quarters, all in good condition.\* The farm is drained by three small streams and a spring bursting from the hillside not sixty yards from the dwelling house kept it supplied with excellent water. "The mansion is near the brink of the hill, overlooking the extreme low-ground, which offers even now a prospect of rare beauty; and which, when the land is improved by marl and made to bear rich crops of grain and grass, will be inferior in beauty to no view which does not embrace either water or mountains."\*\* *Marlbourne* was a typical Southern plantation and had come into the hands of a progressive representative of the Southern slave holder. Upon taking possession of it, Mr. Ruffin immediately set to work to improve the land according to his theory of the use of calcareous manure. Beginning with January 1, 1844, he kept an almost daily record of his farming operations and from this *Farm Journal* one can

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† *Southern Agriculturist*, (n. s.) IV., January, 1844.

‡ *Ibid.*

\* Description of Marlbourne in *Farm Journal*. Ruffin, *Manuscript papers*.

\*\* *Ibid.*







learn just how far he practiced the use of marl which he had so earnestly advocated for many years. On January 24, 1844, no sooner than he had gotten his furniture arranged at *Marlbourne*, "all hands, except five ditchers and one carter, began marling operations, by uncovering marl on the land of Mr. Carter Braxton, close adjacent to my land and where the marl is better than mine. He had kindly offered me this privilege for all that I shall need or desire to use and the offer was an operational inducement to me to buy the land as I feared and believed that the marl was both poor and scanty." \*

These improvements were continued and in 1849, at the earnest solicitation of Mr. Willoughby Newton and other prominent farmers, Mr. Ruffin consented to give an account of his experiments. Accordingly, in July, 1849, an article entitled, "Farming Profits in Eastern Virginia: The Value of Marl," appeared in the *American Farmer*.† This article not only gives us an exact account of the profits of Mr. Ruffin's farm since January, 1844, but also shows clearly that he had made a success in the practice of his theory. At the time the article was written, there was employed on the Marlbourne farm an overseer, with a family of five persons, and over thirty-five slaves. Three horses were kept exclusively for riding and driving, and eight servants were employed in and about the "Great House." The farm, buildings, slaves, etc., were valued at \$28,000.00 and this article shows that on this capital for the five years between 1844 and 1849, Mr. Ruffin made an average net profit of 12.84%, or a yearly return as follows: First year, a loss of .27%; Second year, a profit of 8.16%; Third year, 12.81%; Fourth year, 22.86%; Fifth year, 20.10%. The average wheat crop was from 2,000 to 4,869 bushels annually, corn from 2,830 to 3,080 bushels. In the five years, 276,613 bushels of marl had been applied to the land and the above figures seem convincing as to its utility.

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\* *Ibid.*

† *American Farmer*, V., 2-11.



A story is to this day current in the Marlbourne neighborhood which shows how Mr. Ruffin took every opportunity to put more marl on his land. It is said that one winter, Mr. Ruffin, for some reason, failed to fill his ice-house. A sudden freeze came late in February and, with characteristic neighborliness, the farmers for miles around, knowing that the ice wouldn't last but a day or two, each sent a cart and a negro driver to enable him to fill his ice-house before the thaw came. When Mr. Ruffin found all the teams assembled in his stable-yard soon after daybreak, the report goes that he concluded that the opportunity was too good to miss and, preferring marl to ice, he sent every cart to the marl pits. That evening he sent the carts back home with a message of thanks and appreciation, saying, that the timely loan had been a great help to him. To this day the farm shows the effect of the marl applied by Mr. Ruffin in 1844-48, and is one of the richest and most productive in Eastern Virginia.

In connection with the above mentioned article on Profits of Agriculture the Editor of the *American Farmer* said: "With pleasure and pride we commence our new volume by calling the attention of our agriculture friends to the paper on this subject (Profits of Agriculture) in our present number, from the pen of that accomplished agricultural writer and successful improver of the soil, *Edmund Ruffin, Esq.*, \* \* \* \* Facts are stubborn things and figures, it is said, cannot lie; but we may be permitted to say, that the writer has in the course of his very able communication demonstrated two things beyond all controversy. First, that poor lands are susceptible by well-directed and enlightened processes of being made fertile,—and secondly, that agriculture as a calling is a profitable one \* \* \* \* The communication of Mr. Ruffin will, we are sure, be the more treasured as its author is as well known for his love of the truth and moderation in all his statements as he is for his brilliant success as a practical farmer and wide spread reputation as an agricultural writer." etc., etc.\* The

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\* *American Farmer*, (n. s.) V., 1.



*Philadelphia United States Gazette* noticed the article thus: "The July number of the (Baltimore) *American Farmer* contains a highly interesting communication on the above named subject (Profits of Agriculture) from the pen of *Edmund Ruffin, Esq.*, of Virginia, author of the well-known and highly esteemed work on 'Calcareous Manures,' and one of the most distinguished practical farmers of the ancient 'Dominion.' Successful in all his private efforts in the renovation of old exhausted lands, Mr. Ruffin's experience is the more authoritative, as well as interesting; and his account is a very encouraging one of the profits that may be actually realized in the intelligent pursuit of those rural occupations, which in all other respects, are known to yield such good returns of health, independence, and happiness." etc., etc.†

From the time of the appearance of this article (1849) to the Civil War there were years of political agitation in which the destiny of the Nation was in the balance. At a time like this, when the entire State was full of turmoil and political strife, it seems strange that the ardent pro-slavery Ruffin did not give some written expression of his political opinion. But not so. The years from 1849 to 1856, he seems to have spent at his chosen calling, namely, that of improving the condition of Virginia's farms and farmers. During all this time his pen was not idle. He contributed to the various agricultural magazines, twelve Essays on Agricultural Subjects, and offered many premiums to farmers of Virginia and Maryland for sets of experiments that would tend to improve husbandry. In November, 1852, he read before the South Carolina Institute, at its fourth annual fair, an *Address on the Opposite Results of Exhausting and Fertilizing Systems of Agriculture*. In 1853, his *Premium Essay on Agricultural Education* was published in pamphlet form. This Essay is a plea for more and better Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges. In 1854, he was appointed Agricultural Commissioner of the State of Virginia.\*

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† *American Farmer*, V., October 1849.

\* *American Farmer*, (n. s.) IX., July 1854.





In 1855, his *Essays and Notes on Agriculture* was published at Richmond.†

While Ruffin was accomplishing these works of peace, the politicians and agitators were bringing on the Civil War. The sentiment for a united South, based on negro salvery and the cultivation of cotton, was daily becoming stronger. In Virginia, a contest was on not unlike that in the Nation as a whole. Slowly but surely the difference between the aristocratic east and the democratic west which had been manifesting itself for more than a century began to widen. The line of demarkation was being clearly drawn. In the western part of the State there was a decided effort to get rid of negro slavery. The Rev. Henry Ruffner, D. D., preacher, educator and publicist, became the spokesman of the west. In 1847, while he was President of Washington College (later Washington and Lee University) he delivered an address at Lexington in which he clearly set forth the position of the west and its grievances against the east, and urged the abolition of negro slavery in Western Virginia for economic reasons. The address was such a clear statement of the position of the west that John Letcher and ten other prominent citizens of that section wrote and asked that it be published. Dr. Ruffner consented and the address became known as the famous "Ruffner Pamphlet." The reception of this pamphlet very clearly defined the boundary between the pro- and anti-slavery sections of Virginia. West of the Alleghenies it was well received; in the east it was either ignored or denounced as abolitionist.\* All other differences of opinion were swallowed up in this great question of negro slavery. Whig and Democrat forgot their dissimilitude and stood shoulder to shoulder to oppose all efforts of the emancipator and abolitionist. Tidewater Virginia was arrayed against Fronter Virginia, slaveholder against liberator, Aristocrat against Demo-

† This is a book of 408 pages consisting of a collection of fourteen Essays previously published in magazines and newspapers. A copy may be had at the Virginia State Library.

\* *Kanawha Valley Star*, August 3, 1858.



crat. A division similar to this was forming in national affairs. However bravely the boys in blue later may have fought for the preservation of the union; however gallantly the boys in gray may have battled for abstract and somewhat intangible principle, the real factor in bringing on secession, the real *casus belli*, was the economic institution of negro slavery. The South was "solid" on this question; and secession, a secession, not of individual states, but of a section, in which the states were united by a bond of common interests, was freely talked. Books began to appear, defending slavery not only as an economic good and necessity, but also as a divine institution, beneficial alike to master and slave.

Under such conditions as these Ruffin could no longer remain oblivious to political affairs. From his father he had inherited both a number of slaves and a disposition to defend the rights of the states as opposed to the centralizing tendencies of the Federal Government. For over forty years he had been a master of slaves, growing rich in the proper management of their labor, and his notable success as a practical farmer had doubtless done much to confirm his belief that slavery was an economic good. Ever since the adoption of the Federal Constitution his family had stood for the sovereignty of the states. It was but natural that he should stand for these things now. Taking the pen that had wrought such a revolution in the agricultural world he began to defend the institution that was the mainstay of Virginia's declining aristocracy, that was a source of income to the slaveholders of that state, and that was to be overthrown by the bloodiest war in all history.

In December, 1856, he published in the *Richmond Enquirer* an Essay on the *Causes and Consequences of the Independence of the South*. This article consists largely of political prophecy and deals in dreams of an independent, slave-holding, aristocratic nation, composed of the Southern States of the Union, enjoying the benefits of free trade and having amicable relations with its neighbor of the North.\* Following this Essay there

\* *Richmond Enquirer*, December, 1856. A copy of this Essay is appended to *Anticipations of the Future to serve as Lessons for the Present Time*: Richmond: J. W. Randolph, 1860.



appeared in 1857 a pamphlet entitled *The Political Economy of Slavery or The Institution considered in regard to its influence on public wealth and the General Welfare.*†

As Ruffin's pamphlet was the expression of the anti-slavery sentiments of West Virginia, Ruffin's voiced the opinion of the East and Lower South. Ruffin had contended that slavery was injurious to the public welfare and for economic reasons should and could be gradually abolished without detriment to the rights and interests of slave-holders. On the other hand, Ruffin claimed that slavery was an economic good, both to master and slave, a blessing on the country, a divine institution, second only to the institution of marriage and parental rule. In elaborate argument he contended that the master of the slave was benefitted by slavery, that the slave was also a beneficiary, and that the abolition wave then sweeping over the country, arose from many ignoble reasons, which were hidden behind the veil of religion and philanthropy. The condition of the master, he argued, was improved because he had leisure for social intercourse, thus making possible the far-famed civilization of the South. On the other hand the farmer and his sons in the North were day-laborers, his wife and daughter menials. Thus they could accumulate wealth but they were totally debarred from that polish and refinement which was the characteristic of the Southern gentleman.

The condition of the slave was best under slavery because he was well fed and cared for; he suffered from no panics or suspension of specie payments; for reasons of self-interest he was well treated by his master, instances of cruelty being no more frequent than cases of the cruelty of a man to his wife and children; he had received more of the benefits of Christianity and civilization in two hundred years of slavery than in four thousand years of freedom in his native home; he was utterly incapable of managing for himself and all his wants were supplied by his master; he was cared for in his old age; and he did

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† A copy of this pamphlet may be had at the Virginia State Library and the Library of Congress.







not have to undergo the sufferings of class slavery which would inevitably follow the abolition of slavery as it then existed. Mr. Ruffin believed that the emancipators of the North were hypocritically hiding behind the mask of religion to carry out their plans. "The present leaders," said he, "in this Northern warfare against Southern Slavery are actuated much less by love for the slaves than by hatred for their masters. Their lust for political power is a still stronger operative motive than either. \* \* \* \* \* If they, or other as malignant and more powerful leaders, should ever succeed in abolishing this institution in these Southern States, it will not only be the utter ruin of these States but one of the heaviest blows to the well-being of the world, the most powerful obstacle to the settlement, culture, civilization and highest improvement of all this western continent, and the extension of free government and the true principles of freedom among all the superior races capable of appreciating and preserving these blessings."

The Essay goes further and attacks the Colonization Society and all connected with it. The characteristics of the negro race are dwelt on and the author seeks to prove that the negro is by nature incapable of ever attaining to a sufficient degree of intellectuality to warrant his being given the rights and privileges accorded to the whites. In the pamphlet the doctrines and teachings of Thomas Jefferson are freely attacked and denounced as the dreams of a theorist and the imported heresies of a political visionary. Finally the sentiment of the South is voiced thus: "\* \* \* \* \* It seems to me an inevitable deduction that the institution of slavery is as surely and manifestly established by the wise and benevolent design of God, as as the institution of marriage and parental rule—and it is next to and inferior to these only, in producing important benefits to mankind." \*

This pamphlet was followed in that same year by *Consequences of Abolition Agitation*, and in 1859 by *African Colonization Un-*

\* *Political Economy of Slavery*, passim. Copies of this pamphlet may be had at the Virginia State and Congressional Libraries.



veiled and *The Colonization Society and Liberia*. The first two are ardent pro-southern pamphlets, similar in tone to the *Political Economy of Slavery* and the last is an Essay published in DeBow's Review,† in which the author endeavors to prove that the attempts to form a successful negro government in Liberia have not succeeded and that the reports of its success which were then in circulation were false and misleading.

In 1860, Mr. Ruffin published *Anticipations of the Future to serve as Lessons for the Present Time*. This is a curious book, purporting to be "Extracts of letters from an English resident in the United States to the London Times from 1864 to 1870." As an appendix the Essay "*On The Causes and Consequence of the Independence of the South*," referred to above, is attached. On the title page the famous words of that great exponent of states' rights, "If this be treason, make the most of it," are printed. The book was written about the time of Lincoln's inauguration, the preface being dated June 5, 1860, just after the Letcher campaign of 1859 had brought the slavery question to a head in Virginia, and at a time when Ruffin was in perfect accord with other leaders in urging secession without delay. In the preface the author announces that, while he claims no gift of prophecy, he has assumed some things to have happened and reasons *a priori* from these assumptions. He "does not believe, as being among such consequences [of secession] either that the then remaining states, (as the "United States" or in any other character) will deem it expedient to make war on the seceding states or to invade Southern soil, (unless the anti-slavery fanaticism shall have ripened to insanity, and also become general with the Northern people) or that they can successfully blockade Southern ports, or be able (no matter how willing or anxious) to excite extensive or important servile insurrection in the South," etc., etc.\* Two leading party men are characterized

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† *DeBow's Review*, XXVII, (1859).

\* *Anticipation of the Future to serve, etc.*, Preface, VI.



as the "wily, able and prominent Seward, and the obscure and coarse Lincoln."

The first letter of the book is dated at Washington, November 11, 1864. It tells of the election of Seward by a strictly sectional and abolition vote. Taking a retrospective view, Lincoln is described as having, in a presidency of four years, committed no "overt act" of violence of Southern Rights, thereby enabling the "Conservatives" or "Union Men" of the South to keep their states from seceding. During his term, seven new states had been admitted, and each had cast its vote for Seward in 1864. Seward opened his administration by attempting to subjugate the South without resorting to any "overt act" by means of an abolition majority in Congress. From this first letter the history of the country is followed down to January 27, 1870, when the South is represented as having seceded and entered into favorable treaties with France and England, and as being in a prosperous condition. On the other hand the North is torn by dissension and the prospect of further disunion. On October 10, 1868, the South is supposed to have offered to end the war, conducted since January, 1868, by a treaty in which every concession was to be given to the South as a separate nationality; and the North is represented as having refused to ratify this treaty only because of an article in which the South claimed an equal division of the net value of all the public lands owned by the United States before the disunion. Since the North would not ratify this treaty a long truce was agreed upon during which the South increased in power and wealth and strengthened her position by means of favorable European treaties.†

Amusing as these things seem to us now, they represented the firm faith of a large percentage of the ultra-southerners of that time and it was such firm faith as this that precipitated that awful conflict.

During all this period of political agitation Edmund Ruffin had not forgotten his primary mission and self-imposed duty of

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† *Anticipations of the Future to serve, etc., passim.*





improving Virginia's agricultural class. While his political books and pamphlets were being printed he was busy experimenting and writing those scientific and practical works ‡ which neither fire nor sword nor the canker of Reconstruction could destroy. The political issue for which he wrote, spoke, fought and bled is now a thing of the past; Virginia gentlemen no longer drink their juleps and discuss current politics while their slaves produce the crops that support them; but Virginia's improved farms are a monument to the life work of Edmund Ruffin that is more enduring than stone and more lasting than the praise of men.

*Anticipations of the Future* was Ruffin's last printed expression of his political convictions. From the time of its publication to the secession of South Carolina, if we may trust the account of a contemporary newspaper, he went about from convention to convention, dressed in homespun, with the Cockade, that emblem of resistance, in his hat, a political Peter the Hermit, preaching Secession wherever he went.\* Political conditions in Virginia were complex. The election of Letcher had been a victory for the west and for the conservatives. Lines began to be more clearly drawn between the east and west in religious, economic and political matters. The east, under the influence of Wise, Ruffin and others began to take an even more decided stand for a United South. The west was no less firmly resolved on staying in the Union. While these internal conditions were holding Virginia back and retarding her Secession, South Carolina, with characteristic impetuosity, passed the fatal ordinance in December, 1860. Mr. Ruffin had ceased to be primarily a Virginian. With heart and mind bent on what he believed to be the economic salvation of his section, that is, Secession, he had become a Southerner first, a Virginian next. Impatient of Virginia's hesitancy and delay, he hastened to the state that had

‡ During this period he wrote: *Communications on Drainage and other connected agricultural subjects—Agricultural, geological and descriptive sketches of lower North Carolina, and the similar adjacent lands*—and numerous magazine articles on like subjects.

\* *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, XI., 172.



acted in accordance with his views. At two o'clock A. M., on the twelfth day of April, 1861, General Beauregard, under instructions from headquarters, demanded the surrender of Fort Sumpter. This was refused by Major Anderson. Then came the order to fire. This honor, and no doubt to him an exquisite pleasure, was accorded to Edmund Ruffin, the champion of Slavery and Secession, and at 4.30 A. M., he fired the first shot that inaugurated the bloodiest war that historians have yet recorded.†

Mr. Ruffin was then sixty-eight years old, twenty-eight years past the age of military duty, but he served faithfully through the four years of war, defending with his aged body what he had defended with his intellect and pen. In 1865, when the South was torn and bleeding, her army ragged, starved and drawn out into that thin gray line of heroes defending home and principle, he was seen on the battlefield in Virginia, near his home and property, riding on a gun casson, his eye keen, his nose scenting the conflict with pleasure, his long, white hair streaming in the wind, the very incarnation of the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war." The ninth of April came. To Mr. Ruffin this day must have been comparable to none other in all history, save that day on Calvary. To his mind the crown of thorns had been pressed down upon the brow of justice and right, and liberty had been crucified.

Life now contained little for him. Lacking the buoyancy and hope of youth he could not see beyond the clouds of adversity and disappointment which had so thickly settled around him. On the fourth day of January, 1864, the seventy-first anniversary of his birth, he had made his will disposing of a large estate. On the tenth day of June in that same year he added thereto a codicil, necessitated by the death of his son, Julian. His worldly affairs were thus put in order, his hope had already been destroyed by the failure of the Confederacy, his life had been

† *Collections of Virginia Historical Society*, (n. s.) X., 380; *Harper's Weekly*, IX., 478; Montecure D. Conway, *Autobiography*, I., 324, note; Mrs. R. A. Pryor, *Reminiscences of Peace and War*, 121, confirmed by letter of Judge Roger A. Pryor to the writer; and various Encyclopaedias.



further saddened by the death of one of his sons, he had passed the allotted scriptural age. Overcome by these griefs and disappointments, and determined not to live under the United States Government, probably foreseeing the horrors of Reconstruction, on June 15th or 17th, 1865,\* Mr. Ruffin took his own life. As he had lived with his life wrapped in the interests of the South, so he died, his body wrapped in the folds of the "Stars and Bars," † the conquered banner of the "Lost Cause."

The History of the Confederacy is a tragedy. The life of its great political leader, Jefferson Davis is a tragedy. So is the life of its great industrial leader, Edmund Ruffin. It is not for us to judge his suicide. Cato of old killed himself rather than surrender; Ruffin of Virginia, killed himself rather than submit to government by the hated abolitionists. He had staked his all and lost. The candle of an ardent life had been snuffed by its own intensity, but the reflected wave of undying conviction will pass on through all eternity to light the path of posterity.

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\* Encyclopaedia Accounts; *Collections* of the Virginia Historical Society, (n. s.) X., 380; and various other sources say this occurred June 15th. *Harper's Weekly*, IX., 478, in a notice of his death, gives the date as June 17th.

† Lyon G. Tyler—*Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II., 647.





# WILLIAM HENRY RUFFNER AND THE RISE OF THE PUBLIC FREE SCHOOL SYSTEM OF VIRGINIA.

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E. L. FOX, A. B.

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Orators have been lauded to the skies, calm, yet persistent reformers have passed away unobserved, worthy souls have been held in disdain, but those men are truly great who fight for a cause against which the masses are opposed, and who, having won the battle, die universally respected and beloved. To the last of these classes William Henry Ruffner belonged.

Ruffner was born February 11, 1824, at Lexington, Virginia.\* His father, Dr. Henry Ruffner, was at that time president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) and was the author of the celebrated "Ruffner Pamphlet." The youth therefore was reared amid the environment of educational life, and the impressions made upon his childish mind probably exerted a large influence upon his later life. Upon the college campus he spent his boyhood days and amid these surroundings, interrupted by the annual visit to his grandfather, Col. David Ruffner, who lived on the Kanawha river near the present city of Charleston, West Virginia, he grew into manhood. He entered college at an early age and at the age of eighteen received the A. B. degree from Washington College. It is an interesting coincidence that, at the commencement exercises, he and James L. Kemper, later Governor Kemper, were selected as student orators, Ruffner speaking on the "Power of Knowledge" and Kemper on "The Importance of Having a Free

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\*Several sketches of Dr. Ruffner's life have been written. Probably the best is that of his daughter, Mrs. Barclay, in the *West Virginia Historical Magazine* Oct. 1902.

See also *Virginia School Journal*, May 1, 1902. The first page of this magazine contains a full page likeness of Dr. Ruffner.



School System in Virginia", and that, later these two men constituted two of the three members of the board of education of the state.

But although young Ruffner was reared amid environments peculiarly educational, he showed through his entire life a strong attachment to nature. He loved the rocks, the flowers, the trees, and the lessons that they taught him. He loved the streams, the hills, the meadows, and the soil with its various treasures. Consequently we find him in the next year after graduation determining to settle in the Kanawha country and revive the production of salt at his father's abandoned salt springs. He made the necessary improvements and, until the latter part of the following year, was engaged in the very promising industry. In 1845 he gave up this work, returned to Lexington, and during the same year received the A. M. degree from Washington College.

From the time of his graduation Ruffner was an active leader in Christian and temperance work, and, having determined to prepare himself for the ministry in the Presbyterian church he attended, during the session of 1845-46, the Union Theological Seminary at Hampden Sidney, Virginia. The following session he went to Princeton, which was patronized by a great many Virginians. But on account of his fast failing strength, he was compelled to return to Lexington. After his return his health rapidly improved and before the end of the year he secured license to take up ministerial work. Owing to the declining health of his mother, who died early the following year, he was given work in the mountains in the neighborhood of Lexington. In the autumn after her death he became Chaplain of the University of Virginia, where he attended the lectures of Dr. W. H. McGuffey and secured the services of a number of the most distinguished theologs of the Presbyterian church in a series of lectures on the "Evidences of Christianity."

In September 1850 he married Harriet A. Gray, and in September of the next year gave up his work at Charlottesville to fill the pulpit of the Seventh Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia



which was fast declining in usefulness and was burdened with a heavy debt. Under Dr. Ruffner's wise and businesslike guidance its strength was greatly augmented and much of the debt was removed. He threw himself into his work with all the vigor he possessed. He was diligent not only in his ministerial work but also in the various controversies that arose, writing in support of his views a volume on "Charity and the Clergy," and delivering, besides, lectures concerning the relation between science and the Bible. These, together with his activity as a member of the African Colonization Society proved to be more duties than his constitution could bear. His health again broke down and he was compelled, against the protests of the members of his church, to relinquish the hope of continuing this ministerial duties.

Consequently he gave up his work and for the second time moved into a rural district—this time in Rockingham County, Virginia, near the present city of Harrisonburg. Here he busied himself chiefly with farming, although he showed the same interest in important questions of the day that he had shown throughout his previous career. He was a staunch anti-slavery advocate, but, although the condition of his health prevented his taking a soldier's part, when the struggle came he was found to be in sympathy with that noble galaxy of heroes who believed that their allegiance was due to the commonwealth that gave them birth rather than to the nation founded, they believed, for the mutual protection of the individual states. Whatever contributions he could make, whether of clothing or food, were given freely to the Southern cause. In 1863 Ruffner again returned to his native town where he remained until his election, March 2, 1870, as the first Superintendent of Public Instruction of the state.

Interesting as is Ruffner's career from the time of his graduation at college to the year 1870, it is only with this date that he became one of the foremost characters of his state. The foregoing outline, therefore, has been given as little space as possible; for it is with this vastly more important period of his life that





this sketch is intended to deal. It is with Wm. H. Ruffner as founder of the Virginia public free school system that we wish to deal, rather than with Wm. H. Ruffner in the other activities of his life. In order to appreciate more fully his labors let us note briefly the educational movements in Virginia prior to 1870.

### EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA BEFORE 1870.

During the early colonial period Virginia was far behind her sister colonies of the North in the matter of education. Before many years had passed from her settlement, Massachusetts was active in the establishment of a system of popular instruction. Likewise the other Northern colonies established systems much more readily than the south. The reason for this condition of affairs is not difficult to find. The North was composed entirely of thickly settled communities. Villages dotted her area from one end to the other. Consequently in the North the population was compact enough to permit of the attendance of a sufficient number of children at the various schools; while, in the South, and especially in Virginia, the plantation made this system impossible.\* As the inevitable result of these conditions Virginia was tardy in legislating for the establishment of schools.

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that no attention whatever was given to this important subject. While it is true that many of the royal governors were uncompromisingly opposed to any system of education, Governor Berkley declaring, when asked about education in Virginia, "I thank God there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them—God keep us from them both†"; yet repeated references to the subject may

\**Madison's Writings* I, 273; III, 294; Dr. Herbert Adams "*William and Mary College*," where also much interesting material may be found on the history of William and Mary College; *Report U. S. Com. of Education* 1899-1900, I, 428-430.

†*Hening* II, 511, 517.



be found by a perusal of the records of the House of Burgesses.† The difficulty arose, not primarily from the hostility of the law-makers, but from the impracticability of enforcing the laws when enacted.

This plantation barrier, which proved so formidable an enemy to education among the citizens of the colony as a whole, was largely overcome among the wealthy and cultured class. Among them the youth was not allowed to grow up in illiteracy and ignorance. As soon as he was old enough, instruction was given him by parents or other members of the household, in the primary elements of education. After these elements were mastered he was put in the care of a family tutor and was trained for the time when he would ride off to the then fashionable centre of Williamsburg to attend William and Mary College,\* or, in case he was the oldest son, for the time when he would be sent to the mother country where each of the distinguished Virginia families had a preference among the English universities. If no tutor was secured the youth was sent to one of the neighboring "Parsons' Schools." † Which were for a long time almost exclusively in vogue in Virginia as a means of elementary public instruction. These schools were so named because the "parsons," in addition to their clerical duties, commonly took it upon themselves to instruct the youth in their own and neighboring communities, in temporal as well as spiritual affairs. Foremost among their doctrines was that which refrains from sparing the rod. In spite of their inadequacy, upon the whole, they rendered the colony an inestimable service and counted among their number of pupils Jefferson, Madison, and Richard Henry Lee.

But from the middle of the eighteenth century to the outbreak of the Revolution, a new movement was on in Virginia—a

† See also *First Annual Report Supt. Public Instruction of Va.* 85-88.

\* Founded by Commissary Blair in 1692; see *Foote's Sketches of Va.*, 150.

† From acts of the House of Burgesses and contemporaneous records it appears that the religious standard of the "parsons" was not high. Act II, 632 declared, "ministers shall not give themselves to excesse in drinkinge or ryott, spending their tyme idlie by day or by night playing at dice and cards." *Foote's Sketches of Va.* 29.



movement that was momentous in her educational as well as her economic history. It was the entrance into the Valley and other portions of the colony, of immigrants from the colonies to the North of Virginia. Thousand after thousand of dissenters swarmed from Pennsylvania, Presbyterians and German Menonites occupying the fertile region of the Valley, Baptists and Lutherans settling along the Rappahannock river. Of all these dissenters the Presbyterians gave the vital impetus to an improved system of education—and their influence never ceased until one of their number, Wm. H. Ruffner, succeeded in securing a full-fledged system of free public instruction in 1870. Many of them were fresh from the halls of Princeton. The newcomers came with the determination to provide for posterity a more competent means of securing a liberal education. As a consequence of this, before many years had passed Augusta Academy (now Washington and Lee University) was established and a few years later, in 1776, the doors of Prince Edward Academy (now Hampden-Sidney College) were opened; besides a number of academies that have been of less importance than the two above named institutions.

During and directly after the Revolution education was at its lowest ebb. Students, who had, for the time being, become soldiers and Tory "parsons," found the climate unsuited for further abode in Virginia. It was during this dearth of education that Jefferson, whose ever open eye beheld the needs and whose sympathetic heart re-echoed the cries of the thousands along the Western frontier of the state for an adequate legislative provision whereby they might enjoy the educational privileges which heretofore only the wealthier class had enjoyed, became interested in better schools. Consequently in 1779, he, with Pendleton and Wyth, drew up a bill which was presented to the General Assembly and which provided for a system of liberal education on the triple basis (1) "of elementary schools which shall give to the children of every citizen gratis, competent instruction in reading, writing, common arithmetic, and general geography"; (2) of collegiate institutions





in which all expenses were to be borne by the students themselves "adding a provision for the full education at public expense of select subjects from among the children of the poor"; (3) of "an university in which all the branches of science deemed useful at this day shall be taught in their highest degree." \* As for the arrangement of the elementary schools, the bill proposed "to lay off every county into small districts of five or six miles square, called hundreds, and in each of them to establish a school for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. The tutor to be supported by the hundreds and every person in it entitled to send their children three years gratis, and as much longer as they please, paying for it." It was proposed that the higher grammar schools should be twenty in number. This plan, which Jefferson declared was the most important bill in the whole revised code, † was utterly ignored by the assembly in which it was introduced and remained unnoticed until 1796. Even when it did receive the attention of legislators it was so overburdened with provisos and amendments that for many years nothing of importance was done. Jefferson himself, elected to the presidency in 1801, was unable to press the importance of the subject until his retirement from public life in 1809. The next year a bill, drawn up by James Barbour, then speaker of the House of Delegates, resulted in the enactment of a law providing for the establishment of a permanent "Literary Fund." This was the most important step taken since the beginning of Virginia history in the diffusion of learning in the state. The "Literary Fund" was the chief source of state aid to education until the time of the establishment of the present system.

The Literary Fund proved beneficial but inadequate in the extreme. ‡ What schools did exist were taught largely by men and women who had been forced to leave the factories of New

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\* *Jefferson's Writings* (Ford Ed.) III, 251-252.

† *Ibid.*, IV., 268.

‡ *Va. Educational Journal*, I, 209.



England as the result of the competition of immigrant labor. Of these the periodicals of the state seem to have had not too high an opinion. \*

The creation of the "Literary Fund" marks the dividing line between eastern and western Virginia in educational matters. Before, there had been little difference in the sentiment of the sections. After this a constant struggle is on. The west had shown itself in favor of free education by the vote it cast in the legislature upon the school bill of 1796. Now, upon the establishment of the "Literary Fund," the west agreed to the provision by which \$15,000 of the income from it should be appropriated annually to the University only on the condition that a free school system should be later established.†

Again in 1816, a bill which was substantially of the Jeffersonian plan, was introduced into the Senate and killed by the vote of the eastern part of the State. Three years later a third bill appeared, this time with more successful results. With this bill the University of Virginia was provided for; and in the next year the last obstruction was removed and the great Jefferson saw the fruition of his labors in a well established University. From this time until his death, his life is devoted to the cause of education in his commonwealth. But although he secured the establishment of the University and was doubtless influential in the creation of the "Literary Fund," he was sadly disappointed in the hope of building up a free school system, with the University as its head, where the children of the poor might be educated without cost. For whatever else Jefferson may have contended, he was the greatest advocate of education of any statesman of his time—despite the fact that historians have ignored this essential phase of his activity, so clearly demonstrated in his correspondence.

From this time on, the west was constantly in opposition to the State University. They looked upon it as an institution

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\* *Va. Educational Journal* I, 209.

† *Report of U. S. Com. of Education* 1899-1900, I, 433.



essentially aristocratic and as a means of depriving them of a large share of the funds that would otherwise go to them through the "Literary Fund," rather than as an institution founded for the instruction of youth in the higher branches of learning. An attempt was made to establish, at the University, a chair of agriculture, but it was defeated by the vote of the west.\*

From this time until the Civil War, and even later, the "old field" school was in vogue. A writer has interestingly described them as "usually old outhouses, fitted up for the purpose, standing in the midst of a field. From this fact, the schools were deridingly called Old Field Schools. The houses were built of round logs, with clapboard roofs, and in many cases, mud and wooden chimneys. Long windows were cut in the logs, in width admitting one small pane of glass. At the windows, in the inside, were writing desks the length of the window, at which pupils could sit and write, facing the light. The seats were without backs, and usually arranged in a square around the capacious fireplace, which was often from six to eight feet in width. The general arrangement was such that dire confusion reigned in the schoolroom; some going to the writing desks to write, others to the fire to warm, while still others were moving back from the fire to cool." † This was the school that children must attend if they desired an education. Even after they were seated on the rude, hard, seats they beheld before them a schoolmaster whose appearance was equally as unbearable and hard. It was his custom to call at the homes of the prospective students of the neighborhood and urge upon the parents the importance of having their children attend an institution of learning. He added to the enrollment as he tramped from house to house.

The "Literary Fund" was intended to aid the needy in the education of their youth. But they were loath to ask for aid from the coffers of the state. They preferred to pay their taxes into the treasury along with the taxes of other citizens, and receive from the State the benefits that were likewise to be

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\* *Kanawha Republican*, Dec. 25, 1841.

† *Va. School Report*, Part III, 61, 69.





received by her citizens whether poor or rich. They desired a system of statewide free instruction and not free instruction given only to those who personally requested it.

In the forties, when the free school spirit had been intensified by the settlement of many pioneers from the North, the hostility of the West was shown in its refusing the University patronage. Although situated in the Western section itself, the University, during the session of 1841-42, enrolled only twelve students from West of the Blue Ridge mountains, out of a total enrollment of the whole state of one hundred and twelve; in 1845, only fourteen out of a total of one hundred and thirty four. \* Western students preferred to attend Marietta College, in Ohio, rather than the University of Virginia.

Particularly in the years from 1841 to 1846, the western part of the state clamored, in its numerous conventions—most important of which were those held at Clarksburg and Lexington, for legislation designed to improve the existing system of common schools and to eliminate the "pauper system." † As a result the legislature was forced to enact a law allowing each county to establish an independent system. ‡ Dr. Henry, father of W. H. Ruffner was one of the leading spirits in these western conventions. In that held at Lexington, he proposed a plan for the establishment of an educational system. \*\* From this plan his son doubtless drew a large part of the plan which he later proposed to the legislature and which constitutes the organization of the present system.

Again in 1858, when the movement was on to make the State University the moulder of the political creed of the South, the West took no pride in its development. Although as a result of this effort, the enrollment increased from less than 200, in 1848, to 645, in 1857, the trans-Alleghany section contributed only 13

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\* *Journal of House of Del.* 1842-43, *Documents* 1 and 6.

† *Journal of House of Del.* 1841-42, *Document* 7; *Report of U. S. Com. of Ed.* 1899-1900, I, 437-39.

‡ *Acts of Assembly*, 1845-46.

\*\* For copy of the plan see *Report of U. S. Com. of Ed.* 1899-1900, I, 381-97.



students. When the final rupture came, one of the accusations brought against the east was that the west had been denied free schools and that their taxes had been expended for the sustenance of an aristocratic university.\*

The "old field" school continued in vogue and was the prevailing means of education when the Civil War began. During the struggle the devastations of war were Virginia's institutions of learning and the battlefield was her young mens' university.

After the close of the war the first movement for the further advancement of learning was that made by George Peabody in 1867. † Peabody liberally endowed the cause of education in the South, which had suffered from the destructive ravages as well as the disastrous consequences of civil war. The fund was given for educational purposes at a time of greatest need. Virginia received assistance from the income of this fund and the spark of education although faintly burning, was not allowed to go out. With the exception of this gift, no noteworthy step was taken to promote general instruction until the meeting of the constitutional convention of 1867-68.

The personnel of the convention is well known to the older citizens of the State. It was controlled by an element that wounded Virginia's pride. Not only was it composed largely of ultra-radical unionists, but twenty four of its one hundred and five members were of the colored race. ‡ A glance at some of the speeches made will convince one that endless disorder reigned. One after another the negroes rose with their constant harangue. This one moved that the compensation of the body be increased, that one that a member of the opposition be expelled.

Whatever the deficiencies and merits of the constitution submitted by this body, provision was made whereby the legislature should, by 1876, establish an elaborate uniform system of free public schools. There was to be a Superintendent of

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\* *Wheeling Intelligence* May 3, 1860.

† *Va. School Report* Vol. I.

‡ *Richmond Enquirer* for the period of the convention.



Public Instruction and a Board of Education, composed of the Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Attorney General. It was also provided that the proceeds of all public lands donated by Congress should be used in the advancement of learning and that various taxes should be applied for the maintenance of the system. The Superintendent of public Instruction was to submit to the General Assembly, within thirty days after his election, a plan for the organization of the schools. \*

Probably this was one of the instances in which a body wrought better than it knew. The negroes were willing enough to demand educational advantages which heretofore only white persons had enjoyed. And the radicals were equally as willing to thrust this privilege immediately upon them. Probably neither comprehended the full significance of the provision when they incorporated it into the constitution.

No sooner had the convention adjourned than a conservative or anti-constitutional party was formed. † Delegates were chosen from the counties and conservative conventions were held throughout the state. They hoped to succeed in having the people reject the constitution. And not the least of their objections was to the provision which directed the legislature to adopt a system of common free schools. The majority of the citizens of the State were opposed to its establishment. ‡ They urged, with a great deal of truth, that the disastrous consequences of the late war forbade any large expenditure that was not a dire necessity. The initiation of an educational system such as the convention had proposed would involve the expenditure of a large amount of the public fund and this expenditure would have to be replaced from the pockets of im-

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\* *Constitution of Va.* ratified July 6, 1869, Article 8.

† Many references to, and articles concerning this party are found in the *Richmond Enquirer* of 1869-70.

‡ *West Va. Historical Magazine*, Oct., 1902, 38.

“Of all the states of the Union, Va. was perhaps the least disposed, up to this date (1870) to adopt the common school system of the Northern states of the Union”. *Report of U. S. Com. of Ed.* 1890-91, 881-921.





poverished citizens. Many other objections were urged against the system. But in the election the conservative forces were defeated, and the constitution was ratified by the people July 6, 1869.

The constitution ratified, the legislature was bound under the provision that "the General Assembly shall provide by law, at its first session under the constitution, a uniform system of public free schools, and for its gradual, equal, and full introduction into the counties of the state, by the year 1876, or as much earlier as practicable." †

The conservative forces were defeated. One of their most obstinate contentions was opposition to a system of free public instruction. Clearly the most effective way, under existing conditions, to affect a victory for themselves, therefore, was to arouse public sentiment against the provision so that the legislature might establish a system that would be real only in name. They believed that the actual fulfillment of the constitution in its section relating to education, would be disastrous to the state.

When the legislature met, it contained, through the efforts of the conservative party, a goodly number of conservative men. The fate of the constitutional provision seemed almost certain of defeat. It was obligatory on the part of the Assembly to elect a Superintendent of public Instruction by March 10, 1870. There were 15 applicants for the place; but the strong arm of Robert E. Lee was supporting Wm. H. Ruffner, and Major Wm. Anderson was also urging his election. When the vote was taken on March 2, Ruffner was the successful candidate. After obtaining the caucus nomination, he was unanimously elected.

The constitution required that within thirty days he should submit a plan for the organization of the system. Consequently these days were spent in profound consideration of the large problem confronting him. It is remarkable that within this too brief space of time he formulated a system that has held

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† *Constitution of Va.* ratified July 6, 1869, Art. 8, Sec. 3.



its own ever since, it was submitted by him. Probably the attempt would have proven futile had he not had before him an excellent plan which his father, Dr. Henry Ruffner, proposed at the Lexington Convention of 1841, and which influenced him largely in formulating his own. He reported his plan to the General Assembly about a week before the thirty days had expired. This plan provided, in general for, first, the specific duties of the Superintendent of Instruction in relation to the other officers of the system, second, the duties of the county superintendent, and third, the duties of district trustees. It also provided that the expenses of the system be covered by funds from the state treasury, the county treasuries, and taxes imposed by the school districts. The school should educate, gratis, all persons between the ages of five and twenty one, who desired to share the benefits of the system. Separate schools should be provided for white persons and negroes. The studies to be taught were orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar and geography. ‡

This plan was reported to the Assembly on March 28, and Ruffner was immediately requested to draft the bill for the consideration of the legislature. This also was a task of no little importance. Ruffner drafted the bill on April 26 and delivered it to Major Henderson M. Bell of the House committee on schools and colleges. Bell was an opponent of the school system but he believed that, since the people had ratified the constitution, its provisions should be scrupulously obeyed by the legislature. This committee, after six days, reported favorably the bill which, after considerable discussion, was passed by the vote: Ayes 71, noes 33.\* In the Senate there was a much more bitter contest. The champion of the bill there was Col. Edmund Pendleton, who also was opposed to a system of free public education; but he was unwilling to disobey the provisions of the constitution. During the whole discussion in this body, Ruffner was seated by Col. Pendleton and, through him, answered the

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‡ *Va. School Report*, 1871.

\* *Journal House of Delegates* 1869-70, 615.



spirited objections that were hurled against him and his "yankee system." When the question came to a vote, however, the result was almost unanimous in favor of the proposed school bill—the vote being 23 to 3.

This action by the legislature assured at least a trial of the public free school. The success or failure of the system depended largely upon Ruffner. And in this connection, it must be remembered that Ruffner was not the first who had attempted this important task. Jefferson had attempted it and—shall we say, failed? He did succeed in establishing the University of Virginia; but he failed in that portion of his scheme which lay nearest to his heart. He failed to secure a school system which was popular with the public.

But not only had Jefferson contended. Through all the intervening years from Jefferson until 1870, a class of noble minds appealed to Virginia to establish a means of free education. Henry A. Wise was one of the most persistent of them all. In a speech delivered in 1846, upon his retirement from Congress to accept the appointment as minister of the United States to Brazil, he declared; "if I had an archangel's trump—the blast of which could startle the living of all the world—I would snatch it at this moment and sound it in the ears of all the people of the debtor states and of the states which have a solitary poor unwashed and uncombed child untaught at the free school. Tax yourselves. First; to pay your public debt. Second; to educate your children—every one of them—at common, primary, free schools at the state's charge." \* But appeals like this were made in vain. Nor was the desire of the whole western section more encouraging in its results. The Clarksburg and Lexington conventions had not accomplished the desired results.

They had all produced almost the opposite effect. Jefferson's interest in primary education had been an important factor in his estrangement from eastern Virginia. And so it was with every important movement made by the western section of the state. And so it was with Wm. H. Ruffner. He knew but all

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\* *Report U. S. Com. of Education 1899-1900*, 397.







too well that he was not courting a popular whim. He knew that he was already being called the instigator of the "yankee system." He knew that eastern Virginia had an able champion, Dr. R. L. Dabney and that the newspapers were printing letters from his opponents, and were heading the columns with such introductions as this: "MORE LEARNED THUNDER—ANOTHER DABNEY BOLT FOR DR. RUFFNER'S BENEFIT." \* He knew that they were exclaiming "the old state wants less of talk and fuss and feathers, and more of practical sense in the management of her school system," † "and the people have consented, though it should never be forgotten, under the persuasive influence by bayonets of the United States government, to make a trial of a mode of education against which their judgment and observation for years revolted" ‡ and "for decency's sake let us not be cursed with any system of schools, public or private, which turns loose such a pack as has rushed down upon us from the free school region of yankeedom since the close of the war."\*\* Indeed those who are unacquainted with the conditions existing in 1870, have but a faint impression of the barriers over which Ruffner had to pass. Surely one whose faith was wavering in the least, could not have withstood the then overwhelming billows of opposition.

Surely it took a great heart and a persistent determination to face the old time combination of political, social and religious agitators who had thwarted Jefferson's most favorite contention, that had beaten to the wall for more than a century a system of state education and that was ready to deal the fatal blow to Ruffner's cherished plan.

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\* *Richmond Enquirer*, April 26, 1876.

† *Ibid* Sept. 1, 1874.

‡ *Va. Educational Journal* I, 223.

\*\* *Ibid* 255.



## SECTIONALISM IN VIRGINIA ON THE FREE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

Enough has already been said to suggest that the same sectional differences that existed in Virginia at the time of the Revolution, and that have existed at almost every period of our important national issues, existed also at the times when the question of free schools was agitated.

Before the closing years of the eighteenth century this spirit had not developed as far as a system of education is concerned. Education was then in the hands of the clergy. Consequently, whatever differences might arise were not of the nature of sectional differences. But with the separation of education from religion, the diversity of interests soon culminated in a corresponding diversity of sentiment in regard to popular education. The final outcome was that the eastern portion of Virginia was opposed to free public instruction, while the western portion—the Valley, the Southwest, and the section now comprising West Virginia—strongly favored such a system. Along with that more democratic and pioneering disposition, and that social environment in which none were very rich and few more were very poor, there came a desire for a system of free education. This is the secret of the differences that continually arose over the subject of education from this time until 1870. Those differences which were prominent during the period from the very beginning of the agitation until 1870 have already been noted. Let us now consider these differences as they were after that time.

Although by 1870 West Virginia had ceased to be a part of Virginia, the Valley and Southwest united to fight the old battle anew. A map of the vote in the house of delegates on the establishment of the free school system would show evidence of a sectional spirit. A glance will reveal the fact that the old and aristocratic sections along the Chesapeake and the James still opposed it. On the other hand the whole of the Valley and Southwest Virginia voted almost unanimously in favor of the system.



In each of these sections was a leader who conducted the campaign against the other. The leader of the Eastern section was Dr. R. L. Dabney. He lived almost on the border between the East and West, but was in sympathy with the Eastern aristocratic spirit. The leader of the West was Wm. H. Ruffner. He on one side, and "class prejudice, sectarian bigotry—disguised as zeal for Christian education," and, most of all, sectional jealousy, were arrayed on the other. Let us note briefly a few of the arguments used by each.

The opponents of the Ruffner system, especially Dr. Dabney, branded him as the great "leveler" and his scheme as the "leveling policy." They feared that there would be a "mixture of the children of the decent and the children of the vile," creating as a resultant, a class of citizens of mediocre value. Again they argued that not all could expect to be great; therefore the preferable plan would be to let some be educated while others remained in ignorance. The truly great, they argued, would rise under any condition. And "the destiny of the major part of the human family is the alternative of manual labor or savagery." Why, then, should this inevitable tendency be interrupted by a smattering of education? Besides, by a system of free schools, the youths would be created into a class of readers one fourth or one tenth cultivated; the "sure result will be the production of a false, shallow, sciostic literature, science, and theology infinitely worse than blank ignorance." Quoting Pope, Dabney declared

"A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring."

As a result of the free school system, they contended, the number of criminals would be increased, lawlessness and vice would become more prevalent, and the state would be burdened with convicts—the fruits of the free school system. This was the story of Prussia, France, and the Northern states of the Union, Dabney declared. He said that Virginia's greatest thinkers had been opponents of a system of free schools and that





he expressed the sentiment of his commonwealth when he protested against a system that "will make a long stride backward into the pagan past when the care of the child lay not in his paternal hearth, but was in accord with the theory, derived from heathen Sparta and Plato's heathen Republic, that the children of the commonwealth are the charge of the commonwealth, and are not under parental restraint." He protested against a system of schools which "are, and inevitably will be, wielded by the damagogues who are in power for the time, in the interest of their faction," a system that has become "mischievous and tyrannical, in that it forces on us the useless, impracticable, mischievous, dishonest attempt to teach literary arts to all negroes, when the State is unable to pay its debts and provide for its welfare, and has been despoiled of its possessions by violence." "Time," he declared, "must be the only teacher of these overweening philanthropists. When they are taught by him that this system of State education has utterly failed to produce the benefits they designed, they will learn that these are the words of truth and soberness." "We freely acknowledge the hope that the whole system may be wrecked at an early date." And back of all these objections were two which have already been mentioned, and which were, doubtless, as effective as all the others combined. These were, first, the extreme poverty of the State in 1870, as the result of the Civil War, and, second, the enmity against any institution that had its origin in the North. \*

These contentions—so strange to us who have seen the effect of the system—and many others, were sown broadcast throughout the State. But Ruffner's sound logic and knowledge of political economy enabled him successfully to refute the objections. With a calm—yet unanswerable—statement of the views of Virginia's greatest statesmen, he proved that they had been supporters of a system of public instruction. He proved by example of countries such as Prussia and the Northern States,

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\* These contentions are taken chiefly from the columns of the *Richmond Enquirer* for this period. See especially the articles by Dr. R. L. Dabney in the *Richmond Enquirer* April, 20, 1876, April 22, 1876, and April 26, 1876.



that education and obedience go hand in hand. \* His pen was constantly busy, furnishing material for the large number of periodicals and newspapers in which he upheld his views. For six years he was thus engaged, until experience hushed the voice that had formerly cried out against him. As the years went by the system became more and more successful until, within a short while, after 1876, the last cry of opposition had ceased. "Never before has a commonwealth, so overwhelmed by the results of a disastrous civil war, risen with such persistent determination and, in one short and troubled generation, placed itself, in all ways so far in advance of any previous period of its history." †

The story of his great work has been told. From 1876, he became the leading educator of his state. He had risen as the champion of education, he had borne every kind of insult, he had braved the fury of his opponents, he had conquered; and now, when the significance of his work had become apparent throughout the state, he was heralded with epithets far different from those with which he had been greeted only a few years before. The Virginia free school system was recognized as a permanent affair, and, whatever had been its deficiencies in the past, it had a promising future.

In 1882, a successor to Dr. Ruffner was elected; and when, in 1884, the legislature made an appropriation for a state normal school, Ruffner became its first president. He had labored for a number of years to secure such a school and it was through his influence that the State Female Normal School was established. The term of his presidency was a successful one. When he retired after three years, the institution was on a firm basis.

Besides his work in establishing an educational system, Ruffner did extensive scientific work. He accomplished a great deal in the line of geological research work especially; locating the Alabama coal fields and examining the properties of coal and iron along the Georgia Pacific Railroad. He also made

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\* *Ibid* May 10, 1876.

† *Report of U. S. Com. of Education* 1890-91, II, 891.



two trips to the state of Washington for the purpose of geological and physical survey work. The closing years of his life were spent largely in writing a history of Washington and Lee University. He died November 24, 1908.

What estimate shall we put upon him who has been called the Horace Mann of the South? Probably it is not too much to say that the following quotation is accurate in its estimate of his work. "That in the brief space of twelve years of official service this accomplished and courageous leader had so conducted the educational campaign that his displacement from office in 1882 left the system so firmly established in the hearts of the people of Virginia that neither the relentless opposition of the defeated combination of its enemies, nor"—"the fierce agitation of a new political administration were able to discourage the educational public of the state, is conclusive proof of the success of this momentous achievement; for in this experiment was involved not only the establishment of the American system of Virginia, but virtually in all the states of the South." \*

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\* *Report of U. S. Com. of Education, 1890-91, II, 890.*





## ROBERT BARRAUD TAYLOR.

BY W. B. ELLIOTT, A. B.

The birth of Robert Barraud Taylor was not the least of events which was destined to awaken the hospitable old borough of Norfolk from its Knickerbocker lethargy. For it was to him she later entrusted her safety in war, and her confidence in peace.

Robert Barraud Taylor was born at Smithfield, March 24, 1774. His father, Robert Taylor, was of good English stock and was a land owner of considerable influence in Isle of Wight County. But the traits of his mother's ancestors were to be more prominent in the son. She, Sarah Barraud, was the daughter of Daniel Barraud\* of Elizabeth City County. She was one of the pious Huguenots who had witnessed the turbulent scenes in southern France. It was from the Huguenot then that Robert Barraud Taylor got his frank nature, which taught him to resent promptly a personal injury, and to love his home and country.

Soon after young Robert's birth, his father became discontented with the easy going ways of the hog raisers and peanut growers of Smithfield, and moved his family to Norfolk, where he entered politics. Meanwhile, Robert, Junior, was put under the instructorship of the master Dr. Alexander Whitehead.†

The father soon became prominent in public affairs and held the office of mayor for three terms.‡ Thus young Robert became acquainted with the best lawyers and politicians, of his time, in the city. He went often, we are told, to the county courts at Suffolk, and would criticise to his father the arguments of the attorneys who appeared there. Perhaps it was the close

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\* Letter from Dr. L. G. Tyler. Grigsby's *Life of Tazewell*. Abstracts from Norfolk County Marriage bonds. *The Lower Norfolk County, Va., Antiquary* IV., 102.

† Grigsby's *Tazewell*, 33-37.

‡ Forest's *Norfolk*.



contact with the government and its workings, that caused him to look to the bar for his profession.

At an early age he entered William and Mary College,\* where he became associated with those who were destined to play distinguished parts in the Commonwealth. John Randolph, of Roanoke, James Barbour of Orange, Litt. W. Tazwell, John Thompson, of Petersburg, and others whose names are familiar in the annals of Virginia, were then members of the institution. When Thompson and Tazwell were seniors, Barbour, Cabell and Taylor were juniors, while Randolph did not join the later class until it became senior.

All the young fellows were said to have been handsome and all except Taylor were six feet tall.† He, however, presented an imposing and elegant statue to the same contemporary. Taylor, later said of Thompson, that he was the brainiest man he had ever known, and decidedly outstripped any of his classmates in debate or conversation. Although most was expected from him, he was the only member of this famous class who never entered public life and died at an immature age, unknown except by his pen.‡

It was here that the life-long friendship began between Taylor and Tazwell, which was to prove fruitful to both. A generous spirit of emulation sprang up between them which brought out the sterling qualities of each. The two men were different in many respects. Tazwell was from the north side of the James and Taylor from the south. This fact meant a good deal in Virginia politics at this time, cut up as she was by sectional interests. Tazwell was reserved and wary in nature, while Taylor was impetuous, and frequently gave way to outbursts of temper. Both were of Gaelic descent. Notwithstanding these differences, they each seemed necessary to the greatness of the other. It is very probable that Taylor would not have acquired the reputation for ability and learning of which John

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\* Obituary in *American Beacon*, April 13, 1834.

† *Va. Hist. Reporter*, I., 1, 72-76, 108.

‡ Grigsby's *Tazewell*, 33-37.



Marshall spoke in highest commendation, had he not had Tazwell by him to spur him on to his best.†

An unfortunate affair between Taylor and John Randolph caused a duel. Taylor was shot in the encounter, and carried the ball till his death. Both of the young fellows were expelled from school, and so Taylor's college education was ended, before he graduated.\*

Since the boy had a manifest liking for the bar, he was immediately installed in the law office of John Marshall, in Richmond. It is said that old folks shook their heads and said that nothing could be made of this wild young fellow. But contrary to the expectations of all, he began to apply himself to work, and his talents soon attracted attention. While he was here, a copy of Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution" fell into his hands. Although he had been delighted before with the progress of the plebeian rebellion in France, because he thought the people were getting their rights, he recoiled now from the cruel barbarities, censured by Burke. The cool, logical style of the great statesman convinced him that the most amicable plan, is the best means to an end. Taylor's sensitive nature and patriotic pride was shocked at the action of Genet and the unprecedented conduct of the diplomatic agents of France in our country. These things, together with the contact with the sound judgment of Marshall, caused him to turn his back upon the tenets of his early friends and to line up with the friends to the administration.

Tazwell had come to Richmond the year before Taylor came and was reading law in the office of Mr. Wickham a few doors from Judge Marshall's office. Soon the college friends again renewed their friendship. They became rivals in a love affair, as was natural for two young men of such similar tastes. It is said that Tazwell won.

Taylor nothing daunted, however, soon directed his affections in another direction. He had returned to Norfolk and

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† Grigsby's *Tazwell*, 33-37.

\* Grigsby's *Tazwell*, 35-36.





was beginning in business by himself. Although he was only twenty-one, he assumed quickly a station at the bar, which told clearly the distinguished career which awaited his life. He had no trouble in persuading the daughter of Captain Preston to join her life with one, which had such glowing prospects. They were married and lived in an old colonial mansion, overlooking the harbor of Norfolk.\*

Perhaps her life was an inspiration to his own, for at this time he acquired habits of thoroughness and carefulness, which gave him a foundation for his later success. He retired late and rose early, his whole time being devoted to his profession. Nothing was left undone which would advance the interests of his clients. No document was left unexamined, no page unturned, no clew unsearched.†

In the meantime, affairs in Virginia politics were coming to a crisis. The commercial interests of the Tidewater and former Loyalists were now Federalists, as were the voters of the valley and Trans-Alleghany regions. In England the interior counties of Virginia found a profitable customer for their abundant wheat crops and the East was interested to preserve undisturbed commercial relations. Jefferson, under the Republican standard, was leading the Piedmont in opposition. The public prints under his influence were fearlessly thundering out vituperation against the administration of Adams. Madison and Jefferson considered the alien and sedition laws an outrage and came forward with a last desperate effort to keep their declining forces together and to deal the Federalists a return blow. In the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions they insisted that the States had a right to judge for themselves whether they should break the federal compact; also that the States had a right and are in duty bound to correct a "deliberate, palpable and unjust" action on the part of the Federal Government. John Taylor, of Caroline went farther and threatened secession, if the hated laws were not repealed.‡

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\* Its site is now occupied by Watt, Rettew, Clay & Co., on Main Street.

† *American Beacon*, April 14, 1834.

‡ Howison's *Virginia. Proceedings of the Assembly*, 1798-99.



In the spring of 1799 the Federalists made a concerted fight to get a majority in the Assembly, to repeal these resolutions. Patrick Henry, with one foot upon the threshold of death, made his last political speech against the resolutions. Early in the contest, Robert B. Taylor allied himself with the Federalists, and soon became known for his debates. At such a critical time, Taylor was selected to represent Norfolk in the General Assembly. Probably, at no period before or since, was a greater number of able men ever elected to that body. Among them were Madison, William B. Giles, John Taylor, George Keith Taylor, Daniel Stewart, L. W. Tazwell and James Barbour. Patrick Henry was elected by the citizens of Charlotte County, but died before the Assembly convened.\*

The principal issue before the house at this session was of course the adoption or rejection of the Madison's Report, written to justify the resolutions of 1798. Taylor, though young, played his part well among such illustrious contemporaries. With George Keith Taylor, also a Federalist, he opposed the adoption of the report.† He argued that it interfered with the legitimate powers of the general government. He said that the people had two organs—the Federal Government and the State Legislature, and that the first was to be preferred because its representation in Congress was more democratic than that of the State in the Assembly. He claimed that the alien and sedition laws were required by the state of the country, and pictured in eloquent terms the dangers arising from foreign invasion. He said these laws would awe the undesirable class of foreigners and keep them out. The sedition laws were not made to restrict the freedom of the press, but to punish its licentiousness, to prevent injury, rather than punish offenders.

This speech was met by the fiery eloquence of the opposition. They protested, that the Laws tended to monarchy and that aliens had the sacred right to trial by jury, that Congress had no more power over the freedom of speech than of conscience.

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\* Howison's *Virginia*.

† *American Beacon*, April 13, 1834.



Following this discussion a motion was put to the effect that the senators should be instructed to do all in their power to get a repeal of the alien and sedition acts. Taylor's cause was unpopular and he was among the minority when the question came to vote.\*

The true worth of young Taylor was soon discovered in the Assembly, and he was appointed to positions on many committees, demanding men of sound ability. Most important of these was a committee to bring in a report by which the courts of justice could be revised, so as better to meet the needs of the government. He was also on committees to amend the penal laws and to examine the High Court of Chancery.

During the same Assembly a proposition was brought in to put a bust of Patrick Henry in a niche of the Hall of Delegates. Taylor was an ardent admirer of Henry; but despite this fact he voted against the measure, because he thought it resembled too much the practice of hero worship among the semi-cultured people of the middle Ages.†

He was not in favor of raising the wages of the members of the Assembly.

His opposition to Republicanism is clearly shown, by his vote to instruct the United States senators to try to get the navy increased, and to let the standing army still stay in commission. He did not want the common law of England to apply in America.

While Taylor had been in Richmond rendering his home city the services of a citizen, Republicanism had stolen in, even to the very seat of Federalism and rapidly gained supremacy. Taylor's services might have been inestimable, still he believed the Federalist cause hopeless and refused to stand for a re-election. He now returned to his practice. At the bar, he was often heard in debate with Wirt, Tazwell and others of like fame.

In 1807, Taylor was one of the jurors who found a bill of indictment against Aaron Burr for treason.‡

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\* *Proceedings and Debates of the Assembly, 1798-99.*

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Lassing's Pictorial Field-Book of the war of 1812, 677-678, 684-85.*







On the 22nd of June of this same year the British frigate *Leopard* stopped the *Chesapeake* just after she had passed the capes, and compelled her to surrender three of her passengers. This was a great blow to the national pride and an insult to the American flag. Although Norfolk was a center for British sympathizers in the South, she became alarmed at such bold conduct. Feeling ran so high that, when an English officer came on shore he was almost torn in pieces by the infuriated mob. Col. Hamilton, the consul on shore, was believed to be in collusion with the commander of the *Leopard* and was subjected to the grossest insults. No attention was paid to the law and mobs went about compelling those who were suspected of favoring the British to sign pledges of allegiance to the United States. The citizens resolved themselves into an Assembly of the whole as in the days of the Revolution and with Matthews at the head, appointed a committee of safety. Taylor, though a Federalist, was on the committee. A preamble was adopted, and it was resolved that there should be no intercourse with the British frigates in our waters, or with their agents until the decision of the Federal Government was known, under penalty of being deemed infamous.\*

Commodore Barron, the commander of the *Chesapeake*, was brought before the courts and charged with treason, in that he surrendered without fighting. Taylor was employed as his counsel and in defending him became very unpopular with the people.† Consequently he was defeated the following year when he became a candidate for Congress in the Norfolk District in opposition to Col. Thomas Newton, the Republican nominee.‡

At this time, Taylor's pet policy was a reform in the method of representation in the State Assembly. He proposed that one member be struck from each county. He defended this scheme on the ground of economy and expediency. It was not

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Cooper's *Naval Engagements of the war of 1812*. Forest's *Norfolk*.

† Lassing's *Pictorial Field Book of the war of 1812*, 677-78.

‡ *Va. Hist. Reporter*, I., i, 72-76.



until later when he became better acquainted with the Commonwealth at large that he espoused the more popular plan of the white basis of representation.\*

In the meanwhile, relations between England and America were coming to a crisis. Treaties were broken, neutral rights violated, seamen impressed and our flag insulted. The Congress which met in 1812 was composed mostly of young Republicans, who were anxious for war. It did not take them long to stir up the fighting blood of the conservatives, and war was declared. It soon became evident that Norfolk was to be a point of attack in the South, and every means possible was planned to defend it until the last. A large force was concentrated here and fortifications started.

Being a Federalist, Taylor had fought the war party, but as soon as war was declared he accepted a commission as Colonel of Horse † in the State militia, and from this time his only thought was how he could render his people the best service. The only military training he had received was in the monthly practice of the home regiment, but what he lacked in military tactics, he made good in energy and enthusiasm. His cavalry command went through vigorous training every day, and many improvements were made in its equipment. On May 10, 1812, Taylor wrote to Governor Barbour protesting against the many modes of training troops, which were then in vogue.‡ He said that all troops in the State should be trained according to one system. As it was, some were trained like English, some like German and others like French troops. When such a mixture was massed together in an army, no one could be certain of their movements, and it was impossible to have them under one commander.

The suggestion was adopted and Taylor raised to the rank of Brigadier General, of the Ninth Brigade.\*\* In this capacity he

\* Ibid I., i, 75.

† *Calendar Va. State papers. Letters of Taylor*, X. *American Beacon*, April 13, 1834.

‡ *Calendar of Va. State papers*, X.

\*\* See letter from above, dated Dec. 25, 1812.



commanded the whole military district of Norfolk, and under his directions, the city was soon so well fortified, as to be pronounced impregnable, both by land and sea. Fort Nelson was strengthened. Fort Norfolk built on the east bank of the Elizabeth River, and all possible approaches by land heavily guarded.

It was well that Norfolk had such a man as Taylor to defend her, for she soon found need of all these precautions. Early in the spring of 1814 the British under Cockburn entered the Chesapeake and were devastating the country with the most atrocious cruelties. After having gone through a series of infamous depredations upon the coast of the Chesapeake he concentrated his forces in the Hampton Roads, preparatory to making an attack upon Norfolk.\* Taylor anticipated his movements, and strongly fortified Craney Island at the mouth of Norfolk Harbor. Three batteries were placed here, and a blockhouse built. Thus fortified it would be impossible to enter the harbor without a stiff fight. The island lay close to the west bank of the Elizabeth River, and a bridge was built connecting it with the shore, in order that infantry might be brought up by land from Fort Nelson. Reinforcements were summoned here, from all parts of the State, but the men were unused to the malarial swamps, and many of them stayed on the sick list. unfit for duty. Captain Betty was in command of the land forces. Many think that General Taylor commanded in person here, but he did not. Of course he planned the battle, and had charge of its execution, being commander-in-chief of the district, but he was at Fort Norfolk, several miles away when the battle was fought.†

After a period of expectancy, the enemy at last moved to the attack on June 22nd. They were twenty-six hundred strong and came in two detachments ‡ aiming to make a simultaneous attack from sea and land. The one on boats and barges moved against the north of the Island, where marines and sailors,

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\* Howison's *Virginia*.

† *Va. Hist. Register*, I., 132.

‡ Howison's *Virginia*.





commanded by Lieutenant Neale, were working the batteries. The guns were trained with such fatal precision, that three of the boats were sunk. One was literally cut in half. The other boats hauled off in discomfiture, and the Virginians instantly sent aid to the drowning wretches in the water.† Meanwhile the other detachment had landed on the main shore, and was attempting to cross the bridge in front of the southern battery. Captain Betty was reinforced here by thirty men under Captain Pollard, sent by Taylor from Norfolk. The enemy were cut to pieces at long shot and were not allowed to come any where near the shore. They soon retreated in confusion, and took refuge in a pine forest on the mainland. The twenty-four pounders from the battery were directed to this spot, and played havoc among the disordered enemy. In all, about three hundred men were lost by the attacking side, while not a single man was killed among the brave defenders. It has been remarked as almost a miracle.\*

Such a defeat filled the British with rage and shame. They abandoned their plans to take Norfolk, and sought easier game. Hampton across the Roads was weakly defended by a force of four hundred men, and Cockburn immediately moved to this point with his whole force. The handful of defenders on the shore of course could not withstand them and before all the citizens could escape, Hampton was in the hands of the enemy. A wanton destruction of property ensued. The degraded soldiers and negroes were allowed to riot in every form of brutality. The officers made no pretense to protect the helpless persons of the citizens from their insults. Women left in the town were brutally handled, and no attention was paid to their outcries by the drunken soldiers.†

General Taylor was utterly powerless to aid the unfortunate town for fear Norfolk would be in danger were he to leave it. Brackenbridge says, "General Taylor made the conduct of the

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† *Richmond Enquirer*, June 29, 1813.

\* Cooper's *Naval Engagement of the war of 1812*.

† *Richmond Enquirer*, July 2, 4, 9, 1813.



British at Hampton the subject of a special protest to Sir Sidney Beckwith, in which he depicted the infamy of their proceedings with manly eloquence." Beckwith was a better hearted man than Cockburn, but he could have prevented these outrages, and did not do it, therefore his name deserves to be printed on the blackest pages of history, alongside of Cockburn.

Soon afterwards, the enemy were driven out of the Chesapeake, and directed their attack against the coast of North Carolina. General Taylor resigned his commission February 4, 1814. He was succeeded by General Parker.\* The appreciation of his ability is shown by an editorial in the *Norfolk Herald*, dated February 6th. The writer said: "We cannot look back upon the term of General Taylor's continuance in office without adding our mite to the applause which he has so amply merited and universally received. Appointed to an arduous command, involving the most serious responsibilities, at a period truly critical and without the aid of experience to direct him, he has triumphed over every obstacle and by his zeal, perseverance and vigilance acquired that capability in his new station which to a mind less active and intelligent would have been a work of years." Many other manifestations of approval and regrets at his retirement were shown. He was given a public dinner by the citizens of Portsmouth and Norfolk. This was a sumptuous affair held at Ducoing's Long Room. Many toasts were drunk to the activity and skill of Taylor.\*\*

James Balkhead, Adjutant General, in his official orders of February the 6th, said that he was much pleased with the condition of Forts Norfolk and Nelson; and that the brigade of State troops, under General Taylor had surpassed his expectation in its acquirement of the knowledge of field experience.†

President Madison recognized Taylor's value although the men were opposed in policies, and offered him a commission in

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\* *Va. Hist. Reporter*, I., 1, 132.

\*\* See the issues of the *Norfolk Herald* for this time. Also Forest's *Norfolk*.

† From his letter in Forest's *Norfolk*.



the United States Army. But true to the old States' Rights school, and his policy of opposition to war, he declined to accept it.

Taylor now disappears from public notice for a time. He settled quietly down in Norfolk, all the while continuing to do a large business in his profession. He was much interested in the education of the youth, and was secretary of the Norfolk Lancastrian Academy, which he had been instrumental in founding.†

In 1822, he was honored by an appointment as Major General of the State Militia in the Norfolk District. He accepted this as it did not require much of his time.\*

During the years of 1824-25 the Marquis de Lafayette made a detour of the States, upon invitation of Congress. Besides the part he had played in our war for freedom, his career as the champion of democracy on the continent, had procured for him a warm place in the hearts of the American people. Next to Washington, he was considered the father of our liberty. People went wild with enthusiasm when his name was mentioned, and when he himself appeared, no display was too good for him. Every State vied to show the hero of Yorktown the most gorgeous reception. Perhaps none succeeded so well as the Old Dominion.

Fifteen thousand people gathered at Yorktown on the 19th of October, the anniversary of the victory, to entertain the Marquis in a grand festival. A writer of that time said, "Generations may roll away, and empires, and old Time itself may become gray, and the bright sun be shed of its glory ere he again look down on such a festival." It was true. Every regiment in the State was on the field and two from the army at Washington, all in dress uniform. Many of the soldiers were old veterans, who had starred under Washington upon these very fields. The appearance of things was preserved very much like they were on that morning in '81, so fatal to the

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† *The Lower Norfolk County Va. Antiquary*, V., 118-21.

\* *Cal. Va. State Papers*, X.





British cause in America. Lafayette slept in the very tent that had served Washington as headquarters nearly a half century before. The old ramparts were very little changed by time.\*

Besides being commander-in-chief of the military forces collected here, General Taylor was chosen orator of the occasion. We quote below, Hugh Blair Grigsby's estimate of Taylor, and what he says about the significance of the choice. From contemporary writers we find that this does not flatter our subject. "General Taylor is about the middle size, slightly inclined to corpulency. His countenance is lighted up with the liveliest and most expressive blue eyes, which reflect the high and chivalrous impulse of the soul within. His head is on the ancient Roman model and according to Gale, indicative of great powers of eloquence. Nor are these indications false. If the guardian genius of Columbia had selected from the scroll on which the names of her brightest sons are recorded some favorite champion to address the veteran apostles of Liberty or the mouldering battlements of Yorktown, I do not think I exceed moderation in affirming that the choice of Virginia would have been confirmed. His elegant deportment, fascinating manners and withal those brilliant powers of eloquence, heightened by high toned military feeling, eminently qualified him for performing with corresponding eclat the ceremony."

A triumphal arch was erected on the ruins of the rock redoubt standing within six yards of the river's bank. The procession began to move towards this at eleven o'clock. It was a sublime spectacle, the old General Lafayette leading up the hillock, followed by a concourse of officers and citizens. He was limping slightly, and leaning on the arm of the governor. When he had reached the triumphal arch, General Taylor stepped from the group collected around, and saluted the Marquis with profound respect and addressed to him his memorable oration. In chaste and beautiful language he recounted

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\* Ward's *Gen. Lafayette's Visit to Va.*, 27-28, 44-46. John Foster's *Tour of Lafayette of the U. S.*, 1824, 201-203.



the career of Lafayette and paid him tribute. We feel that it would be an injustice should we pass farther without quoting some sentences from his masterpiece, which is beyond us to criticise. We have chosen the opening and closing paragraphs for our purpose.

"General, on behalf of my comrades I bid you welcome. They come to greet you with no pageantry, intended to surprise by its novelty, or dazzle by its splendor, but they bring you, General, an offering, which wealth could not purchase, nor power constrain. On this day associated with so many thrilling recollections, on this spot consecrated by successful valor, they come to offer you this willing homage of their hearts.

"Judge, General, of their feelings at this moment by your own. \* \* \* \* \*

"Your life, General, illustrious throughout, in this is distinguished. Time which dims the lustre of ordinary merit, has rendered yours most brilliant. After a lapse of nearly half a century, your triumph is decreed by the sons of those who witnessed your exploits.

"Deign then, General, to accept the simple but expressive token of their gratitude and admiration. Suffer their leader to place upon your veteran brow, the only crown it would not disdain to wear—the blended emblem of your worth and martial powers. It will not pain you, General, to perceive some scattered sprigs of melancholy cypress intermingled with the blended leaves of laurel and oak. Your heart would turn from us with generous indignation, if, on an occasion like this, amid the joyous acclamations which greet you everywhere, were heard no sighs of grateful recollections for those gallant men who shared your battles, but do not, cannot share your triumphs. The wreath which our gratitude has woven to testify our love for you will lose nothing of its fragrance or its verdure, though time hangs upon its leaves some tears of pious recollections of the friend of your early youth, in war the avenger, in peace the father, of his country.



"In behalf then of all the chivalry of Virginia, on this redoubt, which his valor wrested from the enemy at the point of the bayonet, I place on the head of Major General Lafayette this wreath of double triumph, won by numerous and illustrious acts of martial prowess, and by a life devoted to the happiness of the human race. In their names, I proclaim him alike victorious in arms and in acts of civil polity, in bannered fields a hero; in civil life the benefactor of mankind." \*

Lafayette was deeply affected and sensible of the honor which was conferred upon him. There was a solemn earnestness about his manner which impressed all present. Many wept and all were filled with emotion. When General Taylor had ceased his speech he was about to fix the civic wreath upon the Marquis' head, bent in a naïve and graceful manner which bespoke the true man he was, Lafayette wrested the wreath from Taylor's hands, and respectfully bowing, dropped it at his side. In his simple, cordial manner, he then thanked General Taylor in the following words:

"I most cordially thank you, my dear General, and your companions in arms, for your affectionate welcome, your kind recollections, and the flattering expressions of your friendship. Happy am I to receive them on these already ancient lines, where the united arms of America and France have been gloriously engaged in holy alliance, to support the right of American independence and the sacred principle of the sovereignty of the people, happy also to be so welcomed on the particular spot where my dear light infantry comrades acquired one of their honorable claims to public love and esteem. You know sir that in this business of storming redoubts with unloaded arms and fixed bayonets the merit of the deed is in the soldiers who executed it, and to each of them I am anxious to acknowledge their equal share of honor. \* \* \* \* \*

"In their name, my dear General in the name of the light infantry, those we have lost as well as those who survive and only in common with them, I accept the crown with which you are

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\* Foster's *Sketch of the Tour of Gen. Lafayette to the U. S., 1824*, 201-203.





pleased to honor me, and I offer you the return of the most grateful acknowledgments."

When he had finished he moved on to where the troops were drawn up and reviewed them. It was a splendid spectacle. Every man was looking his best with every buckle and button polished. Every movement was with clocklike precision.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, the whole company of fifteen thousand sat down to tables arranged in circles around General Lafayette and his body guard. The country people had been liberal in their preparations and all had plenty. Nothing on so grand a scale had ever been seen in America before. It well illustrated the wealth and generosity of the hospitable old State. At the center table General Taylor presided, assisted by Generals Cocke and Brodnax. Lafayette sat on the right of General Taylor. The banquet lasted till late in the night. Great bonfires were lighted and the people full of convivial joy, gathered around to hear toasts made by men of prominence.

On the next morning, Lafayette set out to Norfolk, stopping by Williamsburg and Jamestown. He arrived at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of October the twenty-fifth. He came on the steamboat Petersburg from Jamestown, which landed at the ferry stairs. A delegation of citizens was there to meet him attended by the Norfolk and Portsmouth regiments. When the steamer came in sight flags were waved from everywhere, and the air was rent with the cheers of thousands gathered on housetops and in upper stories.

Lafayette stayed in Norfolk three days. During most of the time he was entertained at the elegant mansion of General Taylor\*. Many demonstrations of the people's good will were shown. A banquet was served at the Exchange in his honor. He was conducted everywhere with a body guard composed of officers. No man since has ever been honored so by the citizens of Norfolk.

Taylor was again elected to the General Assembly in 1826-27. He took no conspicuous part in the debates. The principal

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\* Ward's *Tour of Lafayette*, 1824.



issue before the house was the adoption of the resolutions proposed by Wm. B. Giles in opposition to the tariff. In interest of his constituents, Taylor opposed these. In this Assembly he was chairman of a committee on schools and colleges and as such brought in a plan for the furtherance of education throughout the State. Jefferson could not have been more zealous than he in his appeals for larger appropriations by the State for the building of more schools.\*

These were momentous years for the Commonwealth, and Taylor was soon to be called upon to serve her in a new capacity, namely, to help make for her a new Constitution. Virginia had developed, beyond the mountains, a west entirely different from the older parts of the State. Confronting many obstacles, the hardy pioneers had planted their homes in the valleys among the Alleghany mountains. The environment was different from that of the planter in the Tidewater. Here the people lived in villages and upon small farms, and consequently found little use for negro slaves. Under such conditions they were naturally democratic, but they had long been denied a voice proportionate to their numerical strength in the State government. Under the constitution of 1776, every man who owned twenty-five acres of land was allowed a vote. In 1829 there were 31,000 white males over twenty-one years of age, in the State, who did not have the right of suffrage under this law. Among these were well circumstanced merchants and craftsmen, who had no use for land. Land was high in the East and such men did not care to keep twenty-five acres of land solely for the right of suffrage. In the West however, land was cheap and taxes light, consequently many men found it no trouble to own land for no other purpose than to give them a vote. Naturally the brother mechanic and professional in the East was clamoring for reform.

At last the protest of the citizens was heard by the Assembly in 1829. The West with a white population of 254,196 had eighty delegates, and nine senators, while the East with a white

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\* *Journal of House of Delegates, Dec. 16, 1826, 34.*



population of 348,873 had one hundred and thirty-four delegates and fifteen senators. It is obvious that a reapportionment according to white basis, would have given the West a greater share in representation. The West not only wanted this, but it also wanted the number of representatives and the length of the Assembly sessions cut down in order that there might be more money in the treasury for building roads and cutting canals.

For many years the justices of the county courts appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the sheriff, had been unsatisfactory to the reformers.

On the 10th of February, 1829, an act was passed organizing a convention to amend the Constitution. Under this act the people met at their respective courthouses and elected four members from each of the twenty-four senatorial districts. At last the hopes of the people had been realized, and everyone waited with anxiety each new move. Not only was this so within the State, but the most distinguished men of the Union, statesmen, the moneyed interests of the North, old planters from the South, all came to Richmond to watch the progress of this convention. Great things were expected from a body, over which an ex-president of the United States, James Monroe, presided, in which another ex-president, James Madison was at the head of the most important committee, and the Chief Justice, John Marshall, was a prominent figure. Taylor was elected with Tazwell, Prentis and Loyall from the Norfolk district, which section was practically unanimous in its opposition to reform.

The convention met the fifth of October 1829. From the first day the paramount questions were: the extension of suffrage and the reapportionment of representatives. The people west of the Blue Ridge were fighting for a representation based exclusively on the white population. The people east of the Blue Ridge, generally favored the mixed basis. The west wanted manhood suffrage, while the east clung to the old method of freehold suffrage.





Taylor had not sided with either section before he came to the convention, and he says: "When I arrived the only sentiment in my heart was an ardent desire to know what was the truth, and when found to pursue it. I conversed with gentlemen of various and opposite opinions, sought for facts in all directions. But as I proceeded, my own judgment became bewildered. It was insufficient to take in so many and conflicting principles at a single glance. Under circumstances so perplexing, I resorted to what seemed to be the only remedy. It was to analyze the materials of which it was composed, to search for reasons and principles, and draw a just conclusion." \*

The conclusion he came to was that representation according to the white basis and manhood suffrage were the only just policies, consistent with the Republican regime. The *Virginia Historical Reporter* casting a retrospective view over the situation, says: "As we look back over his honest deliberation, and the conclusion he came to, knowing at the time that nineteen twentieths of his constituents were against him, we cannot but regret that more members had not adopted his plan, more had not had his forethought and prudence." Perhaps West Virginia would still be under the name and protection of the Old Dominion, and none of the frictions of the fifties would have occurred.

The first matter taken up in the convention was the Bill of Rights. The Reformers were anxious to get the old Bill adopted *in toto*. Some like Taylor desired to go even farther and to amend the Bill of 1776, with resolutions to the effect that equal representation for all voters and manhood suffrage should prevail in the States. The conservatives were afraid to take this step, and wanted to pass over the Bill of Right until more practical measures could be considered.†

Taylor had worked out independently a set of resolutions embodying his principles. He introduced them with the in-

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\* *Debates of the Convention, 1829-30. Richmond Whig*, Oct. 6, 1829.

† *Richmond Whig*, Oct. 7, 8, and 9, 1829. *Little's Richmond*, 56-57.



tention that they might be accepted as an amendment to the Bill of Rights. These resolutions were as follows:

1st. Resolved, that the elective franchise should be uniform, so that throughout the State similar qualifications should confer a similar right of suffrage.

2nd. Resolved, that among those entitled by the Constitution to exercise the elective franchise, there should be entire equality of suffrage, so that in all elections the suffrage of one qualified voter should avail as much as that of another, whatever may be the disparity of their respective fortunes.

3rd. Resolved, that representation should be uniform throughout the State.

4th. Resolved, that individual suffrage should be equal without respect to the disparity of individual fortune, so an equal number of qualified voters are entitled to equal representation without regard to the disparity of their aggregate fortunes.

5th. That in all pecuniary contributions to the public service regard should be had to the ability of individuals to contribute, and as this ability to pay from disparity of fortune is unequal, it would be unjust and oppressive to require each citizen to pay an equal amount of public taxes.

His defense and explanation of these resolutions was not inferior to the other debates produced on this occasion. In substance, he said that his resolutions referred to a single object—the elective franchise, and the mode in which it should be exercised. All our Constitutions, whether State or Federal, are founded on the assumption of these political truths, that free governments are best adapted to human happiness, if not everywhere, at least to the happiness of man in the American States; and that sovereignty resides of right, as well as in fact, in the people, and that the best modes of administering that sovereignty is by agents instead of by the people personally.

He believed that the elective franchise was an essential part of the existing system. It looked to two objects; first, to the persons exercising it,—that is suffrage; in the second place, to the effect of the suffrage, when exercised,—that is representa-



tion. Suffrage is the means and representation the effect. Suffrage then ought to be uniform so as to confer like privileges in like circumstances; or so divided in its co-operation that the rights exercised by persons in one section of the State shall not be denied to other persons similarly situated in another section.

He illustrated this by imagining a county containing three hundred voters. Let two hundred and fifty of these vote for A, and the remainder for B. The house would see that on the decision of the above question would rest, whether A, with two hundred and fifty or, B, with fifty votes would be the representative of that county. It would depend entirely upon the question whether you graduate the votes according to the wealth of the voters or whether you will establish a rule of uniform suffrage. To explain he supposed the two hundred and fifty voters for A, each entitled to an estate worth \$100.00, and fifty for B who have property over and above the qualifications required by law, worth \$1,000.00. If numbers decide, A is elected by two hundred majority, if wealth, B is elected by \$25,000.00 majority. Shown this way it is easy to see how unfair the plan by wealth is. The plan would be impractical, because there would be a rule of the aristocracy, and this would bring about the usual friction between wealth and labor. All the principles for which we had fought in the Revolution would thus be broken down, by putting the government in the hands of the few.

In spite of Taylor's protests that these resolutions should be a part of the Bill of Right, and that they should be adopted as the basis of subsequent work, a motion was carried to lay them on the table, until the other part of the Constitution should be determined. The motion was carried, and Taylor never had a chance to bring them up again.

A few days afterwards, Jones of Pittsylvania brought in a resolution to the effect that representation should be apportioned in the districts, according to the amount of revenue collected in that district for the preceding year. Taylor's constituents did not like his democratic ideas and urged him to





support the resolution introduced by Mr. Jones of Pittsylvania. This was entirely against his principles, so when the issue was presented he made an able speech against the resolutions, saying that they tended to monarchy. He ended by asking the body to defer the vote on the resolution until he could resign his seat, in favor of a man, who could vote according to the wishes of his constituents, inasmuch as his conscience would not allow him to do so.

This request was granted, and in a few days, Monroe read the following letter before the convention:

"Sir:

Many of my constituents have instructed me to support the proposed plan of apportioning representation, with regard to white population, and taxation combined; and I have reason to believe, that a large majority of the people of my district concur in the desire expressed in these instructions.

"It is due myself to prevent all misconceptions of my official conduct. I was elected to this body, with the full knowledge of my constituents that I favored reforms in the existing constitution. I came here untrammelled by instructions and restrained by no pledges. I am unfortunate indeed, in this, that my opinions do not harmonize with those of my constituents; but I have disappointed no expectation; violated no engagement; betrayed no trust.

"Having always believed, and maintained that the value of representative government mainly depends on the principle, that representation is only a means, whereby the deliberate will of the constituent body is to be expressed and effectuated, no act of mine shall ever impair the principle. Had my constituents instructed me, on some matter of mere expediency. or required me to perform anything, which was possible, it would have afforded me pleasure to testify, with how cheerful a submission, I would give effect to their opinions, rather than my own. But they ask what is impossible. They require me to violate my conscience, and the sentiments of filial devotion, which I owe to my country.



Believing (as I conscientiously do) that the measure I am instructed to support is hostile to free institutions; destructive to equality of right among our citizens; and introductive of a principle, that a minority on account of superior wealth, shall rule the majority of the qualified voters of the State, I should be guilty of moral treason against the liberty of my native land, if I allowed myself to be the instrument by which this mischief is effected. In this state of mind, by executing the wishes of my constituents, I should justify myself to their reproaches, for my baseness; and to the more insufferable reproaches of my own conscience.

One mode only remains to reconcile my duties to my constituents, to the higher and more sacred duties I owe to myself, and my country. It is to resign the office, which they conferred upon me; and thereby to enable my colleagues to select a successor, who more fortunate than I am, may give effect to their wishes, without violating any sentiment of private or public duty.

Allow me to ask, that this letter may have a place on your journal. Forgive the feeling which prompts this request. If any eye shall hereafter read my humble name, I wish that the same page, which records my retirement from your service, may also record the motives (mistaken perhaps, but not unworthy) which occasioned it.

I leave the convention, sir, with sentiments of profound respect, and veneration for the virtue and talent which ennoble, and adorn it. My heart will still attend your councils; and I shall not cease to supplicate the Almighty, that he may so inspire and direct them, that Virginia may be regenerated, united, free and happy."\*

I have the honor to be,

Your humble servant,

ROBERT B. TAYLOR.

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\* *Va. Constitutional Convention, 1829-30. Journal Acts and Proceedings, 49-50. Brenaman's History of Va. Convention, 47-48.*



JAMES MONROE, ESQ.,

*President of the Convention.*

The letter is doubly interesting, because it not only shows his position clearly, but also portrays the nobleness of the man behind it. There is none of the trickery of the politician, or the double handedness of a schemer. He is conscientiously frank in every word. His action was admired by friends and enemies from all parts of the State. A letter which appeared in the *Richmond Whig*, November 9th, 1829, gives us the opinion of a citizen of the State. The writer addressing General Taylor said:

"You have been too much addicted to look into the reason of things, too apt to examine and regard fundamental principles, and too deeply imbued with that patriotic spirit, which regards with equal eye the whole interest of a State, rather than the incidental and transient interest of a borough or a county. The time may come, sir, and Heaven speed its advent, when such politicians may yet be in fashion. If your constituents expected you to represent a district rather than the State of Virginia, it was morally right in a representative government for you not to misrepresent them. But your refusal to do violence to your conscience, and to vote for measures, which must impede the future progress and prosperity of this Commonwealth, which perhaps no future act of your life could annul is that for which I thank you."

In December, Monroe was forced to resign his place in the convention on account of sickness. Nothing could show more the estimation of Taylor outside of his own community than that he was chosen by the people of London to take Monroe's place. He declined to accept this honor, however, for fear that he would be taking undue advantage of his Norfolk friends, and that his actions in that case would be misinterpreted as prompted by a spirit of revenge.\*

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\* *Va. Hist. Reporter*, I.





Under the new constitution, Taylor was appointed, by the support of the west, to be judge of the Circuit Court, and Superior Court of law and chancery, for the first circuit and first district of Virginia, composed of the counties of Princess Anne, Nansemond, Southampton, Greenville, Surry, Isle of Wight, Norfolk and Norfolk Borough. He resigned his commission as Major General to accept the appointment April 25th, 1831, but the bench was destined soon to be deprived of his valuable services and on April 13, 1834, he died of pneumonia at his home on Catharine Street.\*

Thus ended a singular life, one which had had difficulties, seemingly put in the way by fate, to retard his course. Being a consistent Federalist he was always in the minority; but looking back over his life, we think with few exceptions, always in the right. Like many other Virginians of the minority party, he was not appreciated by his own fellow-citizens, until after his death. Although the unknown author of his day may have felt the meaning of his words when he wrote thus: "Taylor was a man eminently qualified for the highest stations in life—yet so urbane, so unostentatious, so accessible to all, that he was beloved, admired, respected, in every circle of society, in which his public or private duties called him to act." †

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\* *Calendar of Va. State Papers*, X. *Southern Literary Messenger*, XVII., 3023.

† Obituary in *American Beacon*, April 13, 1834.



# THE JOHN P. BRANCH HISTORICAL PAPERS

OF

## RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

*Published Annually by the Department of History*

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### CONTENTS

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PREFACE	- - - - -	171
WILLIAM BRANCH GILES—GEO. M. BETTY	- -	173
UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF THOMAS RITCHIE	- -	199
LETTER OF DR. JOHN BROCKENBROUGH TO ANDREW STEVENSON, 1834	- - - - -	253
LETTER OF C. W. GOOCH TO MARTIN VAN BUREN, 1835		255
AN ADDRESS TO THE DEMOCRATS OF VIRGINIA, 1840	-	263
AN EDITORIAL FROM THE RICHMOND ENQUIRER, 1842		271

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Preface

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THE originals of the Ritchie Letters published in this number of the Branch Historical Papers are, for the most part, the property of Mr. Ritchie's descendants and are not available to students. I hope that the light which they throw upon the inner workings of politics in Virginia during the period when Mr. Ritchie was active there, and that the service they may be to those doing research in that period will warrant their publication. Many other Ritchie letters may be found in the Jackson, Van Buren, and Stevenson Manuscripts in the Congressional Library. The other letters, addresses, and editorials published in this number of the Branch Historical Papers are either the work of Mr. Ritchie or bear directly upon his interests and activities.

Number 4, volume III, of the Branch Historical Papers will be published in June, 1912, and will complete that volume. It





will contain unpublished letters of Thomas Ritchie and of other prominent Virginians who were his contemporaries. It will also contain two or three short biographies which are now in process of writing. The Branch Historical Papers can be furnished to subscribers or to others at the rate of fifty cents per number, or two dollars per volume.

CHARLES HENRY AMBLER.



## WILLIAM BRANCH GILES.\*

BY GEORGE M. BETTY, A. B.

No period of American history assumes greater importance and is of more interest than that which embraces the establishment and early advances of the Federal government. Protected by and living under the authority of a strong national government, the present day student of the history of our nation is naturally attracted to a study of its birth and youth. During this formative period arose great issues, issues over which great men fought in the legislative, judicial, and executive councils of our nation. During the same period those principles were evolved which in their final results struck at the solidity of the Union itself. With these results before us should not we of the present decade be able to turn the pages of history backward and to form a just and unbiased estimate of the lives of those men who figured in the history of this early period, whether they were members of the school which favored a strong national government, or of the school which was at all times opposed to the centralizing tendencies of the Federalists.

William B. Giles could not have lived in an age more suited to his abilities. He lived in a period in which great thinkers proposed great changes and in which equally as great men fought these changes. As a young man he witnessed the passing of the weak and ineffectual government under the Articles of the Confederation and the establishment of a stronger one. By the time of his death the old ship of state had passed through many crises and was drifting to the great climax when by war and bloodshed the Union would be preserved. Early changes were not accomplished without great struggles. To strengthen, extend, and perpetuate the powers of the newly formed government was a life work of a famous

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\*Awarded the Bennett History Medal for 1910.



school of thinkers; while there were others who kept ever before them the preservation of the rights of states. Giles, a young man, had stood for the ratification of the constitution but at the same time had believed that a government under it would not be a surrender of the sovereignty of his native state. In his national career he constantly adhered to this belief and throughout his entire life was a consistent advocate of states' rights. Jealous of the rights of the people he cast his lot with those who believed that under the policies of the Federalists the government would gradually drift to absolutism. His ability and natural qualities for leadership soon advanced him to a position of prominence.

Old records show that the ancestors of William B. Giles were early settled in Virginia. In Henrico county, Christopher Branch appears as a patentee of lands in 1624; six years later in the same county, appears George Giles. William B. Giles, the youngest son of William Giles, was born in Amelia county on August 12, 1762. His father was a plain but respectable farmer of Amelia. His only brother, John Giles, was killed in the Revolutionary War. A sister, Elizabeth Giles, married, in 1775, John Booker, a justice of the peace of Amelia county.<sup>1</sup>

William Giles was anxious that his son should have the best opportunities in the way of an education and at an early age placed him under the care of Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, the first president of Hampden-Sidney College. In 1779, when Dr. Smith left Hampden-Sidney to become the professor of Moral Philosophy at Princeton University Giles along with other young men accompanied him. In 1781, he received his M. A. degree from Princeton. His education was completed at William and Mary College where he studied law under the great Virginia lawyer, Chancellor George Wythe.<sup>2</sup> Giles always held Dr. Smith and Chancellor Wythe in high esteem and affection often referring to the former as "his benefactor."

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<sup>1</sup>R. H. Brock, *Virginia Historical Magazine*, Vol. LVII, p., 323.

<sup>2</sup>For facts in education, see *Virginia Historical Magazine*, LVII, p. 323, *Richmond Enquirer*, December 16, 1830.





Upon leaving William and Mary where he had exceptional advantages in preparing for the law, Giles began the practice of his profession in the courts of Petersburg and the surrounding counties. In one of his first cases he is said to have been pitted against Patrick Henry. It is known, however, that as a young man he became acquainted with a no less distinguished Virginian, George Mason. Sitting with a company at a hotel in Richmond, Giles found the ratification of the constitution to be the all absorbing topic. Boldly advancing arguments for ratification, he so attracted the attention of Mason that an acquaintance, possibly a friendship, sprang up between them. Meeting a friend later in the day Mason remarked, "there was a stripling of a lawyer at the hotel this morning who has as much sense as half of us although he is on the wrong side."<sup>3</sup>

In 1790 a vacancy occurred in the Virginia Congressional delegation by the death of Theodorick Bland, the representative of the Second District, the home of William B. Giles. A special election having been ordered he entered the race as a Federalist, a term which at that time meant only one who had favored the ratification of the constitution. Opposed to him was a Col. Edmonds, a veteran of the Revolution who had the additional advantage in such a campaign, remarks a writer in the *Enquirer*,<sup>4</sup> of a wounded limb. Giles was victorious.

A writer in the *Enquirer* tells an interesting story in connection with this contest which reveals a true element of Giles' character. On election day a voter approached him and a friend, a Dr. Sims, and informed Giles that he had not taken an election day drink with him. "My friend," responded Giles, "I have too much respect for you to seek your vote by offering you a drink, but if you will add your shilling to mine and Dr. Sim's we will all drink on an equal basis."<sup>5</sup>

Early in December, 1790, the First Congress of the United

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<sup>3</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 16, 1830.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, December 18, 1830.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, December 16, 1830.



States assembled for a brief and final session. On December 7, 1790, the newly elected representative from Virginia appeared for the first time presented his credentials and took his seat.<sup>6</sup> At this Congress arose the pet policies of the Federalists. Taking the initiative, their leaders had boldly advanced plans to strengthen the recently created government. On the defensive were the Republicans charging that the tendency of their opponents was to "feel power and forget right." The doors of both parties were open to Giles. A decision was necessary. Should he, a young man beginning a political career, join the ranks of the Federalists under the leadership of such men as Hamilton and Adams standing for centralization of power and a loose construction of the constitution, or should he cast his lot with the Republican party, the party which would defend the rights of states, which would stand for strict interpretation, which would be the party of a militant democracy.

Sectional interests drew Giles into the ranks of the opposition. Coming from a rural and agricultural section of Virginia, Hamilton's plans of building up the manufacturing and commercial North did not appeal to him. The interests of his constituents were agricultural. On the whole the interests of his state were agricultural. Giles had little in common with those who wished to build up manufactures, to found great governmental institutions, such as a national bank, and it was perfectly natural that he joined the Republicans.

Having embraced their faith, Giles soon became an outspoken advocate of the Republican cause. In performing his duties as a member of the Committee on Militia, he made his first stand for the rights of states. To the bill establishing a uniform militia Mr. Huntington of Connecticut had proposed an amendment which provided that the states should furnish the militia with arms.<sup>7</sup> In objecting to this amendment, Giles clearly showed that he believed the states could rightfully refuse to obey the proposed amendment. He boldly declared

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<sup>6</sup>*Annals of Congress*, I Cong. 3 sess., II., 1833.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, II., 1854.



that such actions would be an improper interference with the rights of the state governments. He went further and warned Congress not to put the sovereignty of the general government to the test for "they (the states) may or may not comply with the law, if they should not it will prove nugatory and will render the authority of the United States contemptible."<sup>8</sup>

The chief questions which came before the First Congress, however, and questions which occupied most of its time were the plans of Alexander Hamilton for establishing the national credit. For this purpose he recommended internal revenue taxes, the chartering of a national bank, and the construction and operation of a mint. Hamilton argued that such measures would bring the moneyed classes to the support of the government. This was the very thing that the Republicans, including Giles, wished to avoid and against these policies was inaugurated a determined fight. The revenue bill was opposed by Giles. In opposing this feature of the report he pled for the rights of the people declaring that taxes should be levied on a plan consistent with liberty. Continuing, he noted, with pleasure, "the universal disposition of the members of the House to manifest the most scrupulous attention, in all their deliberations, to the liberties of the people."<sup>9</sup>

On February 1, 1791, the House began the consideration of a more important and comprehensive phase of Hamilton's report. The bill to incorporate the subscribers of the United States Bank having passed the Senate reached its third reading in the lower house, thereby precipitating the most spirited debate of the session. The Federalists in their advocacy of the bank found no more stubborn and persistent opponent than the recent Republican recruit, William B. Giles. Replying to Sedgwick and others, he spoke at length in opposing a charter. The beginning of this speech shows the sectionalism which had crept into the deliberations of the first Congress of the nation. Giles observed with regret a radical difference of opinion between gentlemen from the eastern and southern

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<sup>8</sup>*Annals of Congress*, I Cong. 3 sess., II., 1854.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, II., 1899.







states on great governmental questions and was forced to conclude that "the operations of that cause alone might cast ominous conjecture on the promised success of the much valued government."<sup>10</sup> Proceeding he attacked the constitutionality as well as the expediency of the proposed enterprise. Declaring the bank unconstitutional, he admonished Congress not to stretch the constitution to carry any measure which might be judged useful. "This utility," declared he, "will be the ground of constitutionality. Hence any measure may be judged constitutional which Congress may judge to be useful." Giles implored the House not to do away with "the great distinguishing characteristic of America as compared with the despotic governments of Europe which consists in having the boundaries of governmental authority clearly marked and ascertained."<sup>11</sup> He ridiculed the idea that the constitutionality of the measure had grown out of its expediency, declaring that this was but candidly unveiling the subject of that "sophistical mask" which had been ingeniously thrown over it. He did not see where his opponents had shown that the bank was expedient in that it was the "child of necessity." "All arguments adduced in favor of the measure," said he, "from whatever source they arise, if pursued, will be found to rush into the great one of expediency, to bear down all constitutional provisions and to end themselves in an area of despotism."<sup>12</sup>

In concluding his speech, Giles brought the question of states' rights into the debate by declaring that the establishment of a national bank would be an unwarranted interference with the powers of the state governments. Expressing a doubt as to whether the general government could conquer opposition from the state governments he urged the House not to overstep the bounds of the constitution and to cause a contest for governmental rights. He ably argued the point that the bank would not permanently strengthen the gov-

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<sup>10</sup>*Annals of Congress*, I Cong. 3 sess., II., 1989.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, II., 1993.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, II., 1994.



ernment. The closing sentences of his speech is a good summary of the attitude and feelings of the Republicans. "This government is in its childhood;" said he, "it is therefore unfitted for such bold and manly enterprises and policy would dictate that it should wait at least until it may have become more matured or invigorated. Two modes of administering the government present themselves; the one with mildness and moderation, by keeping within the known bounds of the constitution, the other by the creation and operation of fiscal mechanism; the first will insure us the affection of the people, the only natural and substantial basis of Republican governments; the other will raise and exist in oppression and injustice, will increase the previously existing jealousies of the people and must be ultimately discarded or bring about a radical change in the nature of the government."<sup>13</sup>

On February the ninth, the much discussed bill was passed by a vote of 39 to 20.<sup>14</sup>

On March 3, 1791, the first Congress adjourned. The brief service of Giles revealed to his colleagues what manner of man he was. It was not customary at that time for new members to be silent and the youthful legislator had not failed to make himself heard. His services convinced the Republicans that he would become a fearless and uncompromising defender of their cause; to the Federalists he emerged from this Congress an unyielding and persistent opponent to their paternal plans of government. No doubt the Republican leaders of the time saw that in Giles they had a debator of no mediocre ability and a possible leader in the years to come.

In the second Congress the Republicans remained in the minority. The first important issue upon which the lines of battle were drawn was the apportionment bill. Wishing to make the House a body which would at all times represent the people, the Republicans desired the largest representations possible under the constitution. Accordingly they fought for one representative to every thirty thousand people. In

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<sup>13</sup>*Annals of Congress*, I Cong. 3 sess., II., 1996.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, II., 2012.



this fight Giles appeared an ardent defender of the rights of the people, an avowed opponent to monarchy and the influence of the moneyed classes. Declaring that the people expected the proposed basis of representation he asserted that the sense of the people was the best guide. Warning the House that, "an inequality of circumstances produces revolutions in government from democracy to aristocracy and monarchy," he argued for a large house which would counter-balance any imperial tendencies of the President and Senate.<sup>15</sup> In regard to the influence of the wealthy classes, Giles alleged that the United States Bank would be the most powerful agent in corrupting the House.<sup>16</sup> He announced the action about to be taken a very important one, far reaching in its effect, ending an impassioned speech with the words: "the government of America is now in a state of puberty. She is to assume a fixed character and in some degree it rests upon the vote now to be given whether she will preserve the simplicity, chastity, and purity of her native representation and Republicanism or so early in youth prostitute herself to the venal and borrowed artifices of a stale and pampered monarchy." He hoped "a universal representation supported by the enlightened spirit of the people would form an effectual resistance to the pressure of the vices of the administration and might establish the government upon a broad permanent and Republican basis."<sup>17</sup>

At the conclusion of Giles' speech an amendment providing for a representative for every thirty-three thousand inhabitants was carried. John Martin, Nathaniel Macon, and Giles all voted against this amendment.<sup>18</sup>

Before the adjournment of the second Congress the activities of the Republicans again turned to the Treasury department. From the master mind of Alexander Hamilton had emanated the financial plans of the Federalists. With William B. Giles as their leader the entire strength of the opposi-

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<sup>15</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 2 Cong. 1 sess., 178.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 548.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 548.







tion was now directed against the able secretary. On January 23, 1793, Giles introduced a number of resolutions pertaining to certain specified transactions of the Treasury.<sup>19</sup> These resolutions called on the President to cause to be laid before the House copies of the authorities under which loans had been negotiated and that he give to the House the names of the persons to whom payments on the French debt had been made. They called on the Secretary of the Treasury to lay before the House an account exhibiting half monthly the balance between the United States and the Bank of the United States; to lay before the House an account of all moneys which had come into the sinking fund and lastly, that he be instructed to report to the House the balance of all unapplied revenues at the end of the fiscal year ending 1792.<sup>20</sup> In proposing these resolutions Giles stated that they had grown out of the embarrassment with which he had met in attempting to comprehend the report of the Secretary of the Treasury. Taking up the resolutions separately he explained where their necessity had arisen, and ended his speech by saying that he considered it high time for these reports to be presented to the House since they had been legislating for some years without competent official knowledge of the state of the Treasury's revenues.<sup>21</sup>

Although Hamilton met these resolutions in a fair and direct manner, and prepared extensive reports for examination by the House, the Republicans in the face of a Federalist majority renewed the attack. Again William B. Giles was their spokesman when on the twenty-seventh he introduced another set of resolutions personally condemning the Secretary.<sup>22</sup> The first of these resolutions declared that the government could not be carried on unless the law making special appropriations of money be observed. The second announced that the violation of such a law was a violation of the constitution. The

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<sup>19</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 2 Cong. 2 sess., 823.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 835.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 840.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 899.



third accused Hamilton of having violated such a law in that he had used a part of the principal borrowed in Holland to pay the interest on the principal and that he had drawn some of the principal into the United States without instructions from the President. That Hamilton had outstripped his authority in making loans was the fourth charge. The fifth charged negligence on the part of the Secretary in not giving Congress information in regard to money drawn from Europe. That he had borrowed more than was allowable was the sixth. The seventh asserted that Hamilton had not consulted the true interests of the country in borrowing four hundred thousand dollars from the Bank of the United States when as large a sum was on deposit at the bank. The eighth accused him of indecorum towards the House, and the last proposed that a copy of the resolutions be sent to the President.<sup>23</sup>

When the resolutions, with the exception of the first, second and ninth were referred to a committee of the Whole House the Federalists bitterly attacked them. So ably did they defend Hamilton that the Republicans soon realized that they had overstepped the mark and saw ahead defeat of the resolutions. At this time Giles seemed to relent in his opposition to the Federalist leader. On Friday, March the first, he declared that he was aware that he was in a particularly delicate position in which nothing short of the public good could have induced him to place himself and that he wished to hear the gentlemen on both sides and to see justice done, "justice dispersed with moderation and mercy."<sup>24</sup> To a majority of the House justice demanded the defeat of the resolutions. The third resolution was defeated by a vote of 41 to 12, and the others met the same fate by votes in which the yeas never received more than fifteen and the nays less than thirty-three.<sup>25</sup>

Critics of the present day have been severe in condemning

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<sup>23</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 2 Cong. 2 sess., 900.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 923.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 955-963.



Giles for the authorship of these resolutions. To their mind his act was presumptuous and designed to gain notoriety. Before condemning him too severely and charging him with making an uncalled for attack on the ablest member of the Washington administration it should be remembered that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the two greatest men in the Republican party, heartily agreed with Giles. In a letter to Edmund Pendleton, Madison refers to the resolutions introduced by Giles, and expresses the opinion that there existed "a very blamable irregularity and secrecy" in certain transactions of the treasury.<sup>26</sup> In the House he supported Giles and voted for all the resolutions. In his "Anas" Jefferson declares himself in favor of the resolutions and does not attribute their defeat to worthy motives on the part of the members voting against them. Jefferson divides the House into six classes which he holds responsible for the defeat of the resolutions: 1. Bank directors; 2. Holders of bank stock; 3. Stock jobbers; 4. Blind devotees; 5. Ignorant persons who did not comprehend them; 6. Lazy and good humored persons who comprehended and acknowledged them, yet were too lazy to examine or unwilling to pronounce censure.<sup>27</sup> Considering the positions of Madison and Jefferson but not admitting that either was right, why should Giles be given all the credit for the violence against Hamilton; should the mere fact that he introduced the resolutions make him the sole offender?

In the third Congress, the attention of the Republicans turned to foreign affairs. In this Congress their greatest fight was not against an internal policy of the government but for a more vigorous policy in regard to foreign trade. A common belief existed that England in her contest with France had violated the trade rights of neutrals and the Republicans proceeded to make the most of that fact. In the House James Madison introduced some resolutions advocating equal trade privileges and at the same time justifying retaliation on the

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<sup>26</sup>*Writings of James Madison*, I., 575.

<sup>27</sup>*Writings of Jefferson* (ed. Ford) I., 222.





part of the United States in the event of a violation of our trade rights.<sup>28</sup>

Giles was an active supporter of these resolutions. Throughout the fight he attacked the attitude of England towards our trade and commerce and defended the course of France towards our government. He did not wish to see the old adage, "no friendship in trade," applied to France while he was not opposed to a feeling of resistance against England. Admitting that the proposed methods of retaliation would be detrimental to the mercantile class who up to that time had supported the government, Giles expressed the hope that the passing of the Madison resolutions would not mar the feelings of that class for the government. He believed that some of his own constituents would be affected by the bill but had sufficient confidence in their virtue and patriotism to think that they would endure a "temporary inconvenience with a view to the permanent good."<sup>29</sup>

In connection with Giles attitude concerning British Trade we obtain his opinion of the respective merits of the American and French republics. Generally speaking, he considered both to be exponents of the principle of true Republicanism. Asserting that no essential difference existed in the fundamental and modifying principles of the French and American republics, the foundations of both being "the consent of the people" and the pursuit of both an "equalization of rights," he considered France and America natural friends. "It is to the interest of France," said he, "that the United States should continue a Republican form of government. It is to the interest, it is perhaps the salvation of the United States that France should establish and preserve a Republican form of government." In closing his speech he gave vent to a fervid flight of oratory in which he indulged the hope, "that the permanency of the Revolution of France was as much greater than the permanency of the ancient despotism of France as the

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<sup>28</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 3 Cong. 1 sess., 155.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 274-290.



great fabric of nature to the petty plastic productions of art.<sup>30</sup>

In the effort to establish American trade and commerce on a firmer basis a bill tending to the construction of a naval armament was presented. The Republicans opposed this move. Giles discussed the bill from two points of view—first, as a means of protecting our commerce against the Algerine depredations and, secondly, as a foundation for a permanent naval establishment. In the first case he opposed the bill since he considered it to be a declaration of war against Algiers which he did not consider necessary at that time. From the second standpoint he considered that such a course would be a deviation from the policy of paying the national debt since the navy would be one of the most expensive features of the government.<sup>31</sup>

One of the opponents of the resolutions of Madison, Jonathan Dayton, proposed another method of retaliation against England, namely, the sequestration of British debts. To Giles favoring the proposition, the subject resolved itself into the questions—first, the right of our nation to sequester the property of the subjects of another nation; secondly the expediency of exercising the right at that time. He took the ground that America had a right to adopt such a policy, arguing that since Great Britain had committed acts towards the United States furnishing just cause for war, that the United States might adopt any course which might be justifiable in war. To his mind “the law of God, the law of morality, the law of reason, and the law of nature” would all pronounce that the British government which had done the wrong should afford the recompense.<sup>32</sup> As to the second question Giles argued that America had endured enough at the hands of Great Britain and that the expedient time for remonstrance had come. Taking Ireland as an example he pointed out that submission would only lead to imposition and insult.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 3 Cong. 1 sess., 277-290.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 486-492.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 551.



The discussions and agitations over commerce led to the sending of an envoy extraordinary to England to negotiate a treaty; thus the result of these negotiations, the Jay treaty, was the most important matter which came before the fourth Congress. The House delayed an appropriation for carrying the treaty into effect. Edward Livingston introduced a resolution calling upon the President to lay before the House his instructions to Jay and other relative documents. The debate on this resolution hinged on a constitutional point, the power of the House to make such a demand. Giles took no uncertain stand as to the power of the House in treaty making. Along with others he thought that to give efficacy to any treaty the co-operation of the lower body was necessary. He shrewdly appealed to his fellow members by asking whether they like automats should blindly make appropriations without duly considering the objects for which they were made.<sup>34</sup> Such a negative action did not appeal to the representatives and the Livingston resolutions were easily carried.<sup>35</sup>

The House now went into a discussion of the merits of the document. The Republicans led by James Madison opposed the motion of Mr. Hillhouse to appropriate money to carry the treaty into effect; to their minds the provisions of the treaty did not justify such an appropriation. At every turn Madison was supported by Giles, Nicholas, and Page. These Republican leaders convincingly argued that by the treaty the United States would give much and receive little.

In this debate the Southern representatives made possibly their greatest attack on the effect of the treaty on the slavery interests. The treaty allowed Great Britain the principal and the interest of the British debts while the United States received no compensation for the loss of slaves. Madison and Giles defended the cause of the slave holders, the former declaring that he could not understand "the very extraordinary abandonment of the compensation due for negroes."<sup>36</sup> Giles

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<sup>34</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 4 Cong. 1 sess., I., 500-514.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 759.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 777.







took the same stand basing his argument on the treaty of 1783 which he declared had intended the restoration of negroes taken during the war. Mr. Swift argued that this clause referred only to negroes who would be taken in the future. Giles unquestionably answered this by pointing out that the time the treaty was made the British were in New York and the negroes in the South and that the commissioners did not expect the British to march South on a slave hunting expedition immediately upon the ratification of the treaty.<sup>37</sup> This slavery feature of the debate is interesting and significant in that New England was arrayed against the South; three Virginia members, Giles, Nicholas and Madison debated for the slavery interests, while the rights of the slave owners were opposed mainly by two members from Connecticut, Swift and Hillhouse.<sup>38</sup>

With the inauguration of John Adams and a new administration, the relative positions of the Federalists and the Republicans were unchanged. Federalism remained in power while the Republicans continued their aggressive attacks on the policies of their opponents. In the preceding administration the feelings of Washington had not been spared; now their fire was aimed at his successor, the resolute and uncompromising Adams.

The attention of the new Congress turned to France. With the news of the brilliant successes of Napoleon, came the information that France in her fight to crush England, the mistress of the seas, was beginning to consider the United States a British ally. The French regarded the Jay Treaty as a violation of the treaty between their government and ours and initiated a policy of retaliation against our trade. President Adams in a spirited address to Congress resented their action. After discussing various phases of the breach he declared that "such attempts ought to be repelled with a decision which will convince France and the world that we are not a degraded people, humiliated under a colonial spirit of fear and sense of

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<sup>37</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 4 Cong. 1 sess., I., 1026.

<sup>38</sup>*Annual Report American Historical Association* 1901, Vol. 1, 294.



inferiority, fitted to be the miserable instruments of foreign influence, and regardless of national honor, character and interest." The Federalists hailed such a speech with delight, one of them declaring it to be a second Declaration of Independence, while the Republicans simply smiled at such a sentiment coming from one who had swallowed the Jay Treaty without a murmur.

In the debates which followed the Federalists took occasion to give their ideas as to the virtue of the French republic, comparing it in several instances to the Bourbon despotism and urging a determined resistance to the Directory. The Republicans led by Gallatin, Nicholas, and Giles sought to palliate the conduct of France. When Nicholas offered some amendments to tone down the language against the Directory he was vigorously upheld by Gallatin and Giles<sup>39</sup>

In 1798, James Madison and William B. Giles resigned their seats in Congress that they might repair to their native state and take action against the alien and sedition laws, the two recent products of Federalist legislation. From the view point of the Republicans, their opponents had committed unpardonable sins by the passage of these laws. In the Virginia legislature a protest against the "deliberate, palpable, and dangerous exercise of powers not granted" was led by John Taylor, Wilson Cary Nicholas, James Madison, and William B. Giles.

In 1801, the voters of the second Virginia District returned William B. Giles to the House of Representatives. During his absence pronounced changes had been wrought in the personnel of the executive and legislative departments of the government. In 1798, the year of his departure, the cold and masterful Adams was the chief executive; in 1801 he returned to find the Republican champion, the idealist, Thomas Jefferson at the helm. For the first time Giles entered Congress, not the member of an ineffective minority but of a safe majority, a majority which was prepared and anxious to turn the tables of legislation.

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<sup>39</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 5 Cong. 1 Sess., I., 138.



In their opposition to the Federalists and their triumphal accession to power the Republicans had had no more zealous and consistent supporter than William B. Giles. At every instance he had fought for the principles upon which the Republicans carried the day. President Jefferson, however, did not reward him by a position in the Cabinet but left him in the legislative department knowing that the policies of the administration would not suffer at his hands.

Against the Judiciary Act of 1801, designed to entrench Federalism in the third branch of the government the Republicans made their first move. Under this act new judgeships had been erected and filled with Federalists during the closing hours of the old administration. In addition to their antipathy towards their opponents, on account of this the Republicans were fearful lest the establishment of new courts might jeopardize the rights of the state courts.

Consequently, when the bill to repeal the Judiciary Act of 1801, came before the Committee of the Whole House, the chief debate of the session ensued. In this debate, Giles and Bayard had been accepted as the respective champions of the Republicans and Federalists. Conscious of a safe majority at his back and of approaching victory, the former on February 10, 1802, entered the debate and in a speech teeming with invective and sarcasm presented the Republican side. He stated that what he considered the principles upon which Federalism and Republicanism had been founded in the words, "a great portion of the human mind has been at all times directed towards monarchy as the best form of government, to enforce obedience and insure the general happiness; whereas, another portion of the human mind has given a preference to the Republican form as best educated to produce the same end." Proceeding he declared that the Federalists had come to the conclusion that patronage was necessary in order for the executive to be the equal of the two other departments while the other party had contended "that the doctrine of patronage was repugnant to the opinions and feelings of the people." Here he charged that the Federalists, having caused the peo-







ple to turn against them by a misuse of patronage, had sought to intrench themselves in another department. "It is natural," said he, "that they (the Federalists) should look out for some department of the government, in which they could intrench themselves in the event of an unsuccessful issue in the elections and continue to support their favorite principles of irresponsibility which they can never consent to abandon. The Judiciary department of course presented itself as best fitted for their object, not only because it was already filled with men who have manifested the most indecorous zeal in favor of their principles but because they held the offices by indefinite tenures and of course are further removed from any responsibility to the people than either of the other departments."<sup>40</sup> Finally, Giles advanced an argument against the new courts because of their "tendency to produce a general demolition of the state courts." Charging that the Federal judges had claimed jurisdiction over the state he argued that the constitution did not merit such aggression on the part of the Federal government.

After an able and comprehensive reply by James H. Bayard, as typical a representative of Federalism as Giles was of Republicanism, the House no doubt realized that they had listened to the greatest debate of the session. The honors were divided between the two exponents of their respective creeds but the laurels of victory went to Giles when on March the third the old Judiciary Act was repealed.

Certainly no speech by Giles is more characteristic of his style of debate than his attack on the Judicial system of the Federalists. In this speech, his analytical style is easily discerned. In his thrusts, the keenness and force of his sarcasm is displayed. In his attack on the Adams administration he unerringly hit their weak places, asserting at one point that "the depredations committed upon commerce and the excitement produced, thereby, had enabled the administration to indulge themselves in a more decisive course and they at once

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<sup>40</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 7 Cong. 1 sess., 579-602.



pushed forward the people to the X, Y, Z, of their political alphabet before they had well learned and understood the A, B, C, of the principles of the administration." This sally was fully appreciated by both his Federalists and Republican hearers. With telling effect, he ridiculed the Federalists for their sudden change from loose constructionists to strict and literal interpreters of the constitution. With exulting sarcasm, he declared that while in former sessions certain gentlemen had led him to think that they considered the "General Welfare" clause to be the only reliable part of the constitution the same gentlemen had suddenly begun to "tear down all construction to the letter of the instrument."

During the session of the seventh Congress Giles' health forced him to resign. Consequently, he was absent during the first session of the eight Congress, thereby, missing the most important debate of the Jefferson administration, the debate over the Louisiana Purchase. Virginia had too much need for the ability and confidence in the character of Giles to permit him to remain in private life and in 1804 he was elected by the General Assembly to succeed the Hon. Abraham B. Venable in the United States Senate.<sup>41</sup> Accepting the position Giles' credentials were read at the second session of the eighth Congress and his familiar face was again seen in the national halls of the legislature.<sup>42</sup>

In the Federal Senate Giles' first important service was in connection with the Chase impeachment. He was one of the Republican leaders in sympathy with the impeachment proceedings against Justice Chase. John Quincy Adams says that Giles acted as the representative of John Randolph in framing the rules of the Senate.<sup>43</sup> On December 20, 1804, he made a speech on the proper procedure in case of impeachment in which he maintained that the constitution, putting no limit on impeachment, only said that the Senate might justly remove a Judge for any cause they might see fit. As precedent

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<sup>41</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 16, 1830.

<sup>42</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 8 Cong. 2 sess., I., 23.

<sup>43</sup>*Diary of J. Q. Adams* (March 19, 30, 1800,) I., 318.



he cited the case of Pickering. To Giles the Senate did not appear a "court" in impeachment proceedings and he finally induced the Senate to strike out the word "court".<sup>44</sup>

On March 1, 1805 the impeachment proceedings came to a ballot of "guilty" or "not guilty" on the various charges. These ballots certainly show that Giles was not prejudiced against Chase and that he voted conscientiously. To the surprise of all Giles voted "not guilty" on the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 6th and 7th articles.<sup>45</sup>

With the conclusion of the second term of Thomas Jefferson the executive mantle fell on the shoulders of James Madison. Up to this time with a few exceptions Giles had faithfully and consistently supported his party. At the very outset, he began to break with the Madison administration. Despite the fact that his abilities did not fit him for a Cabinet position, Giles, excepting recognition, failed to rightly judge his own case and became a member of the Senatorial Cabal opposed to James Madison.<sup>46</sup>

Upon the bill to recharter the United States Bank coming before the Senate, Giles was for the second time opposed to the Bank. In this connection he spoke against the right of a state to instruct United States Senators. In reply to Mr. Leib who had stated that he felt "absolutely bound" by the instruction of his state and that he considered himself a representative of the Legislature of Pennsylvania, Giles declared that he did not consider himself the representative of the Virginia Legislature although he had unbounded confidence in its wisdom and patriotism. In these words he took a broader view, "I consider myself the representative of the people of the United States delegated to that character by the Legislature of Virginia." He then advanced arguments to prove that the Legislatures had no constitutional rights to instruct United States Senators.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*Diary J. Q. Adams* (December 24, 1804,) I., 324-325.

<sup>45</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 8 Cong. 2 sess., I., 668-669.

<sup>46</sup>*Adams United States*, Vol. IV., p. 430.

<sup>47</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 11 Cong., 3 Sess., 175-208.







With the gathering of war clouds over the nations in 1812 Giles did not oppose the war although he did oppose some of the war bills introduced in Congress.<sup>48</sup>

Upon the retirement of Giles from Congress in 1816 his services in the national Legislature were at an end. In looking back over the years spent, first, as a representative and then as a Senator we have unlimited facts and material for the forming of a true estimate of his worth. From the time of his entrance in 1790, unknown and with no record behind him to the time of his retirement, he never failed to take an active part in all matters coming before Congress. Under the administration of Jefferson he was virtually the Prime Minister of his party. As a member of the War Committee and the Committee on Foreign Relations his record shows that he paid the most scrupulous attention to all matters coming before these committees. It is true that under Madison's administration he became an insurgent, and while today we attribute independence and strength of character to insurgents, many historians speak of the action of Giles as mean and contemptible.

To Giles we must certainly accord ability and intellect. In debate he was powerful and at times irresistible. No one making the slightest study of his life could impose such an uncalled for criticism as does Paul Leicester Ford in the "Nation" of August 17, 1895, when he doubts the competence of Giles to write the resolutions which he introduced into the House against Alexander Hamilton.<sup>49</sup>

The debates in which he participated show beyond dispute his ability as a student of government and parliamentary procedure. Upon the occasion of the Giles-Bayard debate, Giles was acknowledged as the floor leader of his party, and it is hardly probable that the Republicans having just come into power would have put forward a man, incompetent of writing a few resolutions of censure, as their champion to represent them against the greatest debator of the Federalist

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<sup>48</sup>*Annals of Congress*, 12 Cong., Supplemental Journal, p. 1693.

<sup>49</sup>*The Nation*, Vol. LXI, p. 164.



party. Upon the occasion of his retirement in 1816, John Randolph paid Giles a glowing tribute when he said "there never was so great a void occasioned in any assemblage as that caused by the retirement of William B. Giles from the United States Senate."<sup>50</sup>

Giles now returned to "Wigwam," his home in Amelia county, no doubt, believing that the quiet country life would speedily restore him to health. In 1795, he had married Miss Martha Peyton Tabb, the daughter of John and Francis Peyton Tabb. Miss Tabb was a woman of means and this marriage enabled him to live surrounded by comfort. In the "Gazeteer of Virginia" for the year 1835 we have a description of the "Wigwam, the home of the late distinguished William B. Giles, about 62 miles S. W. of Richmond and 156 miles from Washington; 3 miles from the Appomatox. The buildings are of wood but prettily and neatly built and convenient; the situation is in itself pleasant and retiring but does not command a view of much of the surrounding country." Upon the death of his first wife Giles married Miss Francis Anne Gwynn of Price William county. By this second wife he had three children, Thomas T. Giles a member of the Richmond Bar and for a number of years the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Virginia Historical Society and two daughters, one of whom married A. D. Townes and the other Gustavus Myers.<sup>51</sup>

At Wigwam Giles remained, as did Cato of old, pursuing the pleasures of farm life until a crisis again call him into public service. With the agitation for a convention to revise the time honored constitution of 1776, Giles considered that the crisis had come. With increasing years he had begun to live in the past and to think of Virginia's past history as being the best for which she could hope. The old constitution, penned by the masterful hand of George Mason, he considered sacred and he looked upon a revision as a sacrilege. Accordingly he entered the Virginia Legislature in 1826 that he might oppose

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<sup>50</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 16, 1830.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, December 18, 1835.



the bill for calling a constitutional convention. Despite the fact that the bill had passed its third reading at the time of his entrance it was finally defeated by half a dozen votes, but the next year the bill passed in spite of his opposition.<sup>52</sup>

Before the meeting of the Constitutional Convention greater honors were in store for Giles. In 1827, he was elected Governor of Virginia to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Governor Tyler, his term to begin March 4, 1827. At this stage a dispute arose in the Legislature as to whether Giles should serve three years from the time of his inauguration or three years from the inauguration of Tyler. The Legislature finally decided that he should serve until March 4, 1830.<sup>53</sup>

The most important event in the administration of Giles was the meeting of the famous Constitutional Convention of 1829-30. Again the people of the First Senatorial District sought the services of Giles and sent him to the Convention as one of their four representatives. This district consisted of counties well acquainted with the political career of Giles, being composed of the counties of Amelia, Cumberland, Chesterfield, Nottoway and the town of Petersburg.<sup>54</sup>

To this Convention were sent not only "the aged patriarchs" but the "younger promise" of the State. Thus the name of James Madison, James Monroe, John Marshall, John Randolph, B. W. Leigh, Littleton W. Tazewell and William B. Giles were to be found on its roll. No greater number of distinguished Virginians were ever present in any one body than in the Constitutional Convention of 1829-30. Among its members were men who had stood at the zenith of political glory in times past and men who were to stand out among other men in the future history of the State. Virginia's past and future were linked at the meeting of this Convention. Other states looked on with interest while they observed the assembled wisdom of their oldest sister engaged in rectifying the errors and imperfections of the work of the fathers. To

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<sup>52</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 18, 1830.

<sup>53</sup>*American Beacon* (Norfolk, Va.), December 21, 1829.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*







the people of Virginia the work of the Convention assumed a sacred aspect when they remembered that the last services of Madison, Monroe, Marshall and Giles were about to be performed, before they would descend to their "homes of dust."

On account of the feeble state of his health Giles did not take as active a part in the proceedings of the Convention as he would have done under other circumstances. Consistent with his position that there was no need of a Constitutional Convention, he opposed reform at every hand. To his mind the old constitution could not be improved. In the Convention he declared that Virginia had something which was known as the "Virginia Character" and that he didn't wish to see that quiet which had been the peculiar blessing of Virginia destroyed.<sup>55</sup> He opposed the abolishment of the Executive Council and the County Courts which he declared to be institutions tested by 54 years of experience.<sup>56</sup>

The great fight of the Convention and a fight in which was manifested a distinct spirit of sectionalism was the contest between western and eastern Virginia over representation and suffrage. The old system of representation was that each county should send two delegates to the Legislature; under the old constitution suffrage was extended only to free-holders. These conditions oppressed the west, where counties were large and populous. In this contest, Giles stood by the east but not to the extent that he would not yield for the sake of harmony and concord. As Governor of the State and with years of experience behind him he threw the weight of his influence on the side of harmony. "Should we fail in the object for which we are called together," said he, "we would lose the confidence of our constituents and whatever fame and political standing we have acquired and would disappoint the expectation of our fellow citizens of the world. Let us banish all prejudices, passions and prepossessions of sectionalism."<sup>57</sup> One of the last official acts of Governor Giles

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<sup>55</sup>*Proceedings and Debates of Constitutional Convention*, p. 510.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 489-510.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 236.



was the issuing of a proclamation in January 21, 1830, proclaiming the new constitution and directing that it be published in various newspapers.<sup>58</sup>

The term of his services as Governor having expired, Giles returned to his home that he might spend the remaining days of his fast ebbing life in peace and seclusion. Worn out by a protracted public career and in an impaired state of health he was slowly approaching the end. Still the people who had sought so often his services regarded even "the remnant of his obviously precarious life" as valuable and elected him to the Legislature in 1831 that the organization of the new state government might receive the benefit of his long experience. But hands, not human, interfered to prevent this last service to his state and on the evening of December 4, 1830 Giles died "cheered by an approving conscience and confiding in the justice of his countrymen and in the mercies of God." A few days previous to this time, feeling the approach of the cold hand of death he had written a last letter to his constituents thanking them for their "oft repeated confidence" and bidding them an "eternal farewell."<sup>59</sup>

The news of Giles' death having passed over the state many were the tributes of love and honor paid him. As discerns a writer in the *Enquirer* rarely was the old proverb from the Latin,

"Exalted merit, envy oft pursues,  
We hate it living but we mourn it dead,"

better exemplified than in the tributes paid to William B. Giles. Within a few days "the voice of the slanderer was hushed, the whisper of obloquy no longer heard and a feeling of deep and universal sorrow pervaded the state."<sup>60</sup> Tributes and memoirs framed in words of love and reverence were published in the *Enquirer*. One writer honors him with the words: "few men have ever loved their country better and

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<sup>58</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, January 30, 1830.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, December 18, 1830.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, December 18, 1830.



rendered it more, efficient service than William B. Giles. In his domestic life Mr. Giles was affectionate and humane, a good master, a kind parent and the most devoted husband I ever knew;" another in the words: "in the circle of the family he was affectionate and indulgent, in friendship firm and sincere." All who beheld him in public were struck with admiration at his wonderful abilities—but only those who followed him into the privacy of domestic retirement could know how completely his bland and engaging manners controlled every heart."<sup>61</sup>

But kind and loving words uttered after death do not make a great man. When we consider the fact that actions on the part of the people among whom Giles lived and moved preceded these words we more fully appreciate the tributes. William B. Giles never lost the confidence, esteem and love of his constituents. To him they invariably intrusted their political affairs. To them he was a workman well equipped to do their bidding. This love and confidence not only existed in the hearts of his immediate constituents but in the hearts of the people of Virginia. For many years he was a national representative of the State of Virginia and for three years her Governor. For the positions which he held, for his able administration of these positions, and for the trust and confidence under which he held them, we must number William B. Giles as one of the great Americans and Virginians of his time.

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<sup>61</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 18, 1830.

*Ibid.*, December 16, 1830.





## UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO A. RITCHIE.

August 31, 1813.

My dear Brother,

It gave me great pleasure to-day to learn that Mr. Morse had left you in such good health after your late Campaign to Norfolk. I had frequently intended to have addressed you at H. Quarters, and indeed the pen was more than once in my hands for that purpose; but I found on cudgelling my brain for something to say that I had so little interesting to say which the papers had not said before me, that I was induced to give over the attempt. You have now, however, returned from the theater of your labour, if not of danger, crowned with the thanks & the approbation of your country, and there is no one who is not satisfied that you would have encountered the enemy with the same alacrity as you have displayed in meeting the drudgery and privations of a military life. You will find from the papers of to-day that the Executive are organizing a fresh detachment for the protection of Norfolk, and that Frank Preston & Richard E. Parker are the colonels destined to take post at that important position. You best know the degree of preparation they have made to repel any future attempts on that Post.

I hear now and then from my brother John. He was about a week ago, at Ft. Washington, the command of which exclusively devolved on him.

Every exertion seems to be making to bring the Northern Campaign to an auspicious Issue. Pride alone would induce the Secretary at War to do something, after he had proceeded so far as to suspend his functions at the Seat of Government to transfer all his attention to the Seat of War. A little swap of good news is at this moment of gloom and anxiety very exhilarating; and the last night's Mail which brought us the



intelligence of *our* Indians slaying & taking prisoners 87 Indians of the Enemy's Camp, and of Com. Chauncey re-appearing upon the Lake with a new Sch'r of 24 guns gave a thrill of pleasure to my nerves from which I have not yet recovered. I have great & sanguine hopes of the issue of the approaching Contest. Man to man, and gun to gun, and I think we can beat them. The generous principles which animate the breasts of free men contending for their country, her rights & her independence, appear to me to be too powerful for the mercenary principles of hired slaves. If our own officers are united, and are taught to acquire as much prudence and military skill as they possess of gallantry & Enterprise, the issue would be certain. A few weeks will however decide the contest, and leave us full of spirits in the possession of Montreal, or languishing in disappointment on the confines of the U. States. Every friend of his country can have but one wish on this momentous question.

If I were in your place I would make tactics my study & my pride. You have seen a good deal of service at Norfolk; you occupy already an important station in the Malitia, and may aspire to a more difficult & responsible Post. Few things are certainly worthy of more regret in our republican institutions than the number of military officers who are wholly unworthy of the Commissions with which they have been honored. If we wish to preserve the reputation of our Malitia, by improving them into good Soldiers nothing is so essential as to be commanded by good officers.

Business is extremely dull in this City. Few things seem to interest our monied men except the buying & selling of town lots. Property has attained a value which the oldest of our Inhabitants confess they never would have dreamt of its attaining. \$4000 for a half acre unimproved Lot on the Hill is nothing. Many lots you know have been taken up for which no Tickets have been found. This circumstance and the great rise of the Value of Property, have suggested an idea to me which I have for a long time determined to lay before you. Our re-



spected father was in the habit of visiting Williamsburg, which that day was the great fair for men of business. I am told that Lots in this City used to be sold there for little or nothing, and I know one of the prettiest Lots on the Hill which was sold in the Old Raleigh for a Bowl of Punch. Now is it not probable that my father took some of these original Tickets or bought some of the Lots? If he did, is it not probable that these Tickets or some evidences of them are *even now* to be found in his papers? Will you attend to this?—it may be important for us. In the first place, where are those papers? I know there were several interesting papers in the Book-case (my brother William's) which stood in the upper room in the S. wing of the House. Where are those papers now? Again where are the papers which formerly were deposited in Flour Barrels & Old Trunks in the room next to the nursery? And where are all the papers which were once sent to Mr. Robt. Brook (————) to settle at Fredericksburg?

I wish you would write me as soon as convenient on this subject, and put me on the track of those papers. I will take all the trouble of getting them together & examining them, if there be any reason to believe they will reward the search.

My wife does not enjoy very good health. She is happy however in having three healthy children. She wishes to be particularly remembered to my Sister & her children. And believe me, my dear Brother, to be most affectionately yours,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO JAMES MADISON.

Richmond, Sept. 8, 1821.

Daer Sir,

I know not whether I can take the liberty of writing you on the subject of this letter; but I have had so many proofs of your goodness towards me, that I am tempted to address you. Whatever be your reply, I pledge myself not to abuse your confidence. If you wish me not to speak of it, I pledge myself not to do so.

I have long understood—and within the last 12 months from







a mutual friend—that you have a design to give to the world a Sketch of the Proceeding of the Federal Convention. I know not whether you have abandoned this design, or whether and when you mean to execute it. But the appearance of the *Albany Volume* has brought it to my Recollection, and suggests the idea, that perhaps it may hasten the publication of your Book.

Should this be the case, should you have made no other arrangements for the printing of the Volume, will you excuse me for asking whether it is not possible for me to obtain the printing of it? I will spare no pains to bring it out in a manner worthy of its great importance. I have communicated the contents of this letter to no one. I ought to add on my own account, that my own convenience would prefer the commencement of the Book not before the next spring

With the (——) & sentiment of respect, I am Sir,

Your friend & obt. servant.

THS. RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO ARCHIBALD RITCHIE.

January 11, 1825.

My Dear Brother,

What is to become of Archy? Will you train him up forthwith to farming, or let him take a session at Wm. & Mary? The fate of that college is particularly uncertain. The friends of the University and the friends of Wm'sburg write against its removal upon the most contradictory grounds. The former say it will flourish so much at Richmond, they say as to injure the University. The latter again contend, that it will scarcely flourish more here than at Wm'sburg and therefore *why remove it?* I did not suppose it possible that such an opposition could be got up against it: but they leave no stone unturned that is calculated to defeat the measure. I am disposed to think that it may fail, but a few days will decide it. Until then I can say no more about Archy's destination towards it. I hope he continues to read at home good books. Your indisposition, I am afraid detained him at home during the fall. I have directed Bell to write him, and perhaps that will break the ice between



them, and will induce him to let us hear something official about your family; for we can scarcely depend upon common reports.

The Assembly have little to do, and therefore talk of a short session. The Committee of Schools & Colleges are engaged actively in taking testimony about the state of the College, the conduct of President Smith, & & and it may yet be several days before that question will be brought into the House. It may occupy them the better part of three days. The Convention is another question which may take up five or six days. That comes on Saturday next. Then there is the James River improvement, perhaps the University appropriation, and the finance bills. Upon the whole if they press their business with spirit, I think they may be up early in February.

The papers tell me what is going on at Washington, except the under comment of which we know as little as you do. I fear Crawford's cause is almost hopeless. I had a letter from a Western Senator a few days ago, who tells me that C. has many friends in the Western Delegation, but that they cannot think of going for him, apparently against the sense of their own people, unless they see N. York leading the way: that state and his other Atlantic states will give him one-third of the Union, and thus excuse themselves to their people for voting for *him*, but even in the event of N. Y's going for him, there is some, much doubt, of the Western Delegates imitating the example. He adds that 8 western states may otherwise be set down for Jackson, Cook of Illinois being for Adams. I have lost much of my interest in the election since C's chance has decreased.

What a desperate chance would our Reps. have to take between Jackson & Adams. The friends of the two last are very sanguine: But for my part I think there is no certainty about the matter. The members seldom write here. They are cautious shy as a parcel of mice. Their present situation is certainly one of great delicacy & responsibility.

I have not been able to light upon any information about Webb's suit gt. Mr. Ruffin. Two days after you left us, I got



the Clerk to hunt through (as far as he could) the records of the Hustings Office, and the Superior Court. If you would furnish me with additional memoranda, I would resume the search and prosecute it with spirit.

Can you shed any light upon this transaction. Some days since a stranger met me in the street, and asked me if I was related to Wm. Ritchie of Middlesex or Essex. Upon satisfying him upon that point, I asked his reason for the Enquiry, and he then told me that he had a lists of lands in Ohio, belonging to persons in Va. and that in this list was the name of W. Ritchie. He said he was going out to Ohio in a few days, would make all due Enquiries about the land & and would write me accordingly. But if I wish to get information myself on the matter I must write to Anderson's office, I think he said at Chillicothe. Have you any knowledge on this subject?

My paper fails me. I am with love to my Sister & family, affectionately your Brother,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO COL. A. RITCHIE.

(No date)

My Dear Brother,

Mr. Noel will be good enough to bring you this hasty epistle. My engagements have been such that I have not had time to see your Delegates till to-day: tho' they have promised me on their return, to come and see me. I think they are both very respectable and prepossessing men.

The Legislature has been in a sort of hurly-burly, since they met. There are many new members; many young ones; many whom I never saw and who never saw me: several from the West have come not very well inclined to take my part, because they were for Tucker and I was for Giles. They were for Roads and Canals at all events, and I only when the Constitution should be amended to authorize them; and what with





these causes, and what with the offence I had given to some about the Yorktown bill and to others by the Wm. & Mary College bill & &; and what with the votes which my opponent got by his personal friends & legislative acquaintances and some who felt for his poverty, and the Adams & Clay men, and what with the 10 or 12 (——) votes he got, he received the vote you have seen. Not contented with that some of his friends are trying to strike at me in other ways. A young member from Harrison (son of John G. Jackson) who nominated Tucker first and J. H. Pleasants next, has proposed a Resolution to let out the Public Printing to the lowest job. Meantime they are circulating every description of *lie* against me; that it is the most lucrative office in the Commonwealth, when the net profits do not exceed \$1200, of which I only receive *one third* (the rest is divided among printers whom I have *interested* in the work, to have it well and properly done, and as well or as properly, it has never yet been done). They say that it is a (——) when I read all the proof-sheets, and turn out at almost all hours, day & night, to see their work; when I read over yesterday, most carefully, equal to 50 pages in octavo of the public work. They say that I employ a printer to do the work at most inadequate wages, and skim the cream myself; when it is a fact that Shepherd, the best printer infinitely in the Commonwealth, and equal to any in the Union, receives a salary of \$850, besides being as much interested in the profits as I am, that is just one third. When I proposed 3 years ago to resign, Shepherd would not let me. He was pleased to say such had been my liberality, he could not consent to lose me. But they will not lie me down. I have weathered too many a storm to care for *this*. If they put out the work to the lowest bid, be it so. They have the right to do it; and they may at their own risk try a project, which did the work at Washington so badly & so slowly that Congress had to abandon the system, & employ a Public Printer. Let the thing go as it will, I shall not bow my spirit before the proudest of them. I am as honest as any of my opponents, and as independent and as unbending. They calumniate me too as a Dictator, as



possessing too undue an influence in the Commonwealth (this is what that foolish fellow the Editor of the Whig charged upon me last Tuesday), but I laugh the imputation to scorn. It is a poor compliment to the citizens of Virginia to raise my influence at their expense. It is false as it is malignant. It is a leaf torn from the Richmond letters, and I will not stoop to answer it. I have stood by Virginia like an affectionate son & an honest man. I stand by her at this moment when I am humbly attempting to defend the Constitution against the heresies of J. Q. A. I am with Jefferson and Madison and Giles and Tazewell & Randolph & John Roane and all the old School Republicans. I will not cower to this pressing storm, take my word for it. Never did I bear so lofty a spirit about me.

But enough of this and of myself. Albert Ruffin has not determined yet what to do. I have urged him in the strongest manner to move to Richmond. He will not yet say. He and Wm. Roane have not yet settled about Springgarden.

We have a letter from Bell to-night saying she has written you. I hope she will be with you.

I have sent you  $\frac{1}{2}$  doz. poor oranges and 4 good potatoes. They are of the Pennsylvania sort I wrote you about. Do boil only two, and *in steam*. And put the other 2 in the ground *directly*; well dug up well manured & covered with a little straw. I wish you to try the experiment of planting potatoes before the Spring. Pray give them a fair chance. I will send you some more by another oppy. for spring planting. They are the best American potatoes I ever tasted, boiled in steam and afterwards squeezed. They are the Mercer potato from Westchester.

Tell my sister I trust Bell will please her, and to consider her with all the kindness which she has always shown to me. I think too that Juliet & Jane will like her.

I suppose your wheat is miserable as it is in every place from which I have heard. I go for a small crop, of course, and have sown mostly the flint wheat of N. Y; most of it \$2 a bushel. You see what a dashing farmer I am, and scarcely expect from present appearances to reap my seed wheat.



The happiness of the season be with you and yours, and the bounties of Providence all the year round.

Your most affectionate Brother,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

Thursday Evening

P. S. I send you to-days Enquirer.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO COL. A. RITCHIE,

Essex.

Thursday, June 8th, 1830.

My Dear Brother,

I was much disappointed in receiving your dispatches instead of seeing you in person. We had been expecting you for ten days past and though we had received no message from you, announcing my sister's coming with you, yet we warmly indulged such a hope. I am sorry that you did not come and still more for the reason of your detention, but we look forward with certainty to your promised visit in July. Be so good as to drop me a line as soon as you have ascertained the period of your visit.

I was unable to obtain the A. (—) Certificate. until after 3 o'clock yesterday, for I was so much engaged that I could not go upon the Street, and this forenoon I have settled the Acct, at the Auditor's office. The Treasurer has given me a check for \$263.80, which I have placed agreeable to your Instructions to your credit upon Acct. I shall not be able to send Davy off until between 2 & 3 o'clock this evening. and he will reach Eliza's tonight and you tomorrow pretty early.

I have sent you the two last Enquirers, in which you will find all the floating news of the day. I have this day had a long Conversation with Stevenson, and a pretty long one with McDuffie. I infer from the remarks and tone of the latter that the storm in S. Carolina is blowing over, that the proceedings of Congress for the last few days previous to adjournment will have the effect of tranquilizing her excited politicians and of





putting (——) the measure of *nullification*. I told him very plainly that in my opinion Virginia would not co-operate in such a measure. He said that the most the politicians of S. C. had thought of doing was to declare the Tariff null & void by a Convention, and then leaving it to her Juries to refuse giving judgments on the Revenue Bonds. He seemed to think that even this course would now be abandoned, though he said he had no idea that Congress, organized as it now was, would modify the Tariff so as to make it acceptable or tolerable to his state. I suggested to him that the measure might be got rid of by breaking in pieces the Combinations which had carried it through, but this was to be done by degrees and required time—that next winter we might reduce the duty on sugar and thus lessen the attachment of Louisiana to the Tariff—that in reducing the duty on iron & wool we might strike N. Jersey & N York from the Tariff states, and thus we might get back to the old times. He, however, contended that a reduction on sugar would be lost by a majority of 30 votes, and that the various interests which were involved would stick together, and defeat any gradual or detached attack. I confess upon the whole his tone is much softened down, and that I have almost lost all fear of a *storm from the South*.

Our friends are, of course, in high spirits for Gen. Jackson's Message on the Maysville Bill. It does not exactly come up to our Virginia Doctrines, but it does a great deal, by arresting (——) & competing local appropriations, for the benefit of this and that sectional improvement, which were wasting the public funds and bribing the members of Congress out of their Constitutional principles. When I heard of the way in which the Old Hero was beset, by members from the West telling him if he rejected the Maysville Bill, he and they were gone there, that it would Scatter dissatisfaction through most of their districts—when I recollect how many interests he was going against in taking his ground, I am more & more impressed with the great moral courage he has exhibited. I understand Eaton & Ingham were for his



signing the bill, Van Buren & Branch against it. On Sunday morning, after sitting up all night the President was very much (——) in their forcing the Light House & Harbor bill upon him, filled with God knows how many little appropriations for roads and canals & &. in order to force them all down his throat, or by his rejecting them, rousing up so many various interests *against* him. He exclaimed with some warmth "Let them come on—all—I am ready for them." That bill you know he kept by him on Monday morning & refused to pass upon. Webster was very anxious to continue Congress together in order to force him to act, and thus get material against him for the Summer Campaign. The obligations we owe Old Hickory for stepping in at this crisis & saving the Constitution almost at its last gasp, are great indeed.

Upon the other great question, (the West India Trade) I cannot give you satisfactory information. Most of the members of Congress I have seen and hear from do not seem to augur much for McLane's negotiation. At least so I understand them to say from the papers that were confidentially laid before them. On the other hand a private letter or two has been received, perhaps by the President, which holds out more encouraging prospects. I know the President told Governor Duval near 3 weeks ago, that he was very anxious for the arrival of the Packet, as he was in hopes she would bring a treaty, and would require the action of Congress. But two or three Packets have come, and no treaty, but the negotiation is still going on. I do not despair myself of a Treaty, upon the information I have had, though of course, I can make up no positive opinion. This is a matter deeply interesting to you farmers, at this time too, would have much effect on the coming harvest. I wish to God that I could have the pleasure of announcing the opening of the W. India ports. No news can be more agreeable to the public.

Give my warmst love to my sister & the girls with their families, and believe me must affectionately your brother

THOS. RITCHIE.



## THOMAS RITCHIE TO ARCHIBALD RITCHIE.

Richmond, Dec. 28, 1830.

My Dear Brother,

The Legislature has not yet got into the thick of their Business. The Judiciary system not (———). Indeed I believe they are getting clear of this smaller business, to prepare for their heavy work. I have heard no opinion expressed of the course that things will take. There begins to be some anxiety shown about the (———) Daniel, Wilson & Pendleton, of the old ones the most spoken of Mr. Roane is a candidate and will get a respectable, if not successful vote. P. P. Barbour, St. George Tucker & R. Stanard, spoken of for the Court of Appeals. Stanard has resigned or will soon resign his office of Attorney of the U. S. Indeed I had application from R. G. Scott for a letter to Washington, recommending him to fill the *vacancy*, but I declined, as I have uniformly done every other, I can't say how many, as I have determined to ask nothing from this Administration for myself or any of of my friends. It was with the greatest pain I could not give your protage a letter.

I trust you will be a candidate at the next spring election. We will try to make the session agreeable to you, if it is the will of the good people of Essex to send you here. I have no doubt they will do so.

I have little news from Washington. Clay's friends will try to bother Old Hickory by sending him a Mass of Bills about Internal Improvements. I understand little is to be done till the middle of Jany. on account of Peck's Impeachment, and some of them think if they don't do a great deal this session, it will not be much regretted.

With all our most affectionate recollections to my Sister & the girls & their families, I, am, my Dr. Brother.

Ever Yours,

THOS. RITCHIE.





THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES,

Lindsay's Store, Albemarle.

My Dear Sir,

Dec. 6, 1832.

Whilst I was sitting yesterday in the midst of the College of Electors, yours by Dr. Rodgers was sent in to me. I concur with you fully in your Views of giving Richmond the go-by for the present, and, indeed, was not so very easy, after addressing you my hasty letter to Washington, in consequence of some remarks dropped by your friends, until I had sent you a Message through (—) Green, who promised to write you from Fredericksburg on that very subject. You have done right in going Home, as I am now well convinced.

For the two vacancies you, Barbour, & J. Randolph are the most prominent. You, I decidedly think the strongest man, and I think the shadow of a doubt does not exist that you may prepare yourself for a Seat in the Senate. The only question is how they will run the Candidates, whether you and Barbour or R. for the first Vacancy. Perhaps after all, Randolph may not be run at all, in which case I am strongly disposed to think that you & B. will be the two, but in what order I can not guess. I need not say I count with my best wishes and with almost certainty on your success.

The President's Message has given the highest satisfaction, and the Treasury Report will clinch it. His tone about S. C. is precisely what it should be.

Do favor me at your earliest convenience with the extracts of letters from Lafayette. Tell me how I am to use them.

Wm. wrote me that not having received my last Draft before he left Paris (indeed it did not reach him before he got to Geneva,) he had been indebted to your kindness, as on a thousand other occasions, for an advance of money to spend him on his tour. As it is highly probable he had no oppt. of returning it, before you left France, will you do me the favor to let me know the amount, that I may replace it with my warmest thanks?

In great haste, I am, my Dr. Sir,

Most truly yours,

THOS. RITCHIE.



THOMAS RITCHIE TO ARCHIBALD RITCHIE.

Tuesday morning.

My Dear Brother,

Dr. Brockenbrough furnishes me the first favorable opportunity I have met since Archy's sale to remit the proceeds. You will be mortified that they are no more and so am I.

I put him into the hands of Gamble to sell, who has done his best, but unfortunately a few days before you sent him over, two vessels had sailed for N. Orleans freighted with negroes, and that mode of disposing of them was of course lost. On Wednesday after Mr. Noel's departure, Gamble put him up, but Archy had lost one of the joints of the fore finger of his right hand, which the negro buyer said disfigured him for the picking out of cotton, and he would bid no more than \$300. On the following Saturday G, tried another sale, and the most he could get was \$350, which by expenses as per bill, is reduced to \$331.75. Dr. B. will be so kind as to take charge of it for you.

I have scarcely time to add that Archibald is a fine boy and behaves as yet to my entire satisfaction. I am now just about to have a little time to look into his books with him, and try him & spur him up. He sends you a letter which I fear is like one of my last year's newspapers, so old that it contains no news, for the Dr. has been so long moving that A's letter has got somewhat stale by the delay.

Isabell & all my children are well. I am delighted to hear that you are riding about.

With the warmest love to all,

Yrs. ever

THS. RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Lindsays Store, Albemarle.

My Dear Sir,

I recd. yours this morning & have now in Exchange to congratulate you on your election to the S. of U. S. in place



of Tazwell. The vote is highly honorable to you. In the H. of D. 122 for you, 3 for J. Randolph, 2 for P. P. Barbour, and one for Floyd. In the Senate, 31 for you. In all 153 for you and 6 against you. You were nominated by Gilmer and Yancey & a good deal of contending took place about your *Tariff Faith*. Many of the friends of the Admn. were anxious to put Randolph in Tazewell's place (for 2 years) and you in Tyler's (for 6), but they found you would beat Randolph, that he could not be elected—and would only be abused, and they were unwilling to divide the party by any quarrelling. &— Who is to be run against Tyler, I know not—but possibly Barbour.

I am sorry that you will be again torn so soon from your *Home*—but you will have to do a great duty—& I will not disguise from you that *much* is expected from you. Stanard (who sits by me) bids me tell you that you must go to the Senate, throwing away the scabbard, neither asking nor giving quarter.

You will see the Debate &, in the Enq. of tomorrow morning

Yours Truly,

T. RITCHIE

Monday— Dec. 10, (1832?)

THOMAS RITCHIE TO ARCHIBALD RITCHIE.

Nov. 23, 1833.

My Dear Brother,

I was in hope that when I next wrote you, I would be able to inform you that William had returned to my own roof. We are now in daily expectation of seeing him, as he arrived at Pha. in the Susquehannah Packet yesterday week, and he writes me that he would complete his business in that place by today, when he should set out for Baltimore. I understand from Mrs. Edward Mayo, who saw him last Sunday that he is more robust, very ruddy, and that he has more confidence though he has not yet forgotten how to blush. If I find him possessed of brass enough for the bar, it is my





intention to place him immediately in some law office, for prosecuting his studies.

We have Billy Harrison with us at present, and Mary Green is at home near us. My dear Wife is very well, being much improved in her health & looks by her visit to the Springs.

I am preparing for my Winter's campaign, and a hard one and perhaps a hot one I may expect it to be. However, I will make up my mind to take things as quietly as possible.

So much for all of us, and now do let me ask you, how you are? Dr. Austin Brockenbrough relieved my mind very much about your health, but still I can not help feeling some solicitude about you, and I trust you will write me a line telling me how you find yourself, and how my dear Sister is. You know that you have promised me a letter, and I need not assure you how very acceptable all your letters were that you addressed me last summer. I shall be delighted to hear that you are better from the attack you have had since you returned home.

We cannot get every thing smooth in the political world. We have had some excitement among us about Lt. Randolph & J. H. Pleasants, and I can not help wishing that these good folks at Washington would let us alone, and not be the means of bringing such men into consequent sympathy. Judge Brockenbrough has very properly discharged Pleasants, and that clamour is therefore at an end. And I presume that Robt. B. Randolph will apply to the Federal Court for an injunction and will get his (——) reduced. We learn that his jail-room has been much frequented by his sympathizing friends, and among them the eccentric Chief Magistrate of the Commonwealth.

We shall have much excitement during the session of Congress. You will see that Duane is about to take the field against the Administration in reply to the Globe. And on the whole, the Bank question, in its different phases, will be the leading topic of the session. I hope we shall be able to strangle the Monster, and that all the tricks & diversions of its friends and abettors will be unable to save it.



We are still annoyed by the running away of the Slaves in our city. I hear last night two valuable ones decamped, perhaps more. I have not yet lost any, but expect every day some such mishap. After a time most of us will be compelled to employ in our families in town free people of color. We must tighten our laws this next session and subject the masters of (——) to a stronger police.

I think Richmond is improving. Real property is certainly upon the rise, and more houses are building than I have ever known. In case we should succeed in the James & Kanawha Improvement, there would be a much greater impulse given to every thing about us.

Present all my love to Sister & the family, and believe me my dear Brother, Yours truly & affectionately,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Richmod, Jany. 6, 1834.

My Dear Sir,

This is the first letter I have written to any of my friends at Washington for nearly four Weeks. Times are out of joint in politics, and I do not like to bore my friends with lamentations and complaints. I spent my Xmas with all my Family (ten children) at Brandon, and immediately on my return, I was met with the distressing account of my Brother's death. Excuse me therefore for not having answered sooner your acceptable letter.

William has been so occupied with his arrival that he has scarcely found time to do himself any sort of justice in writing you. He begs me, however, to say that in the course of a few days he will do himself that pleasure. He has just commenced the study of the law, and he will scarcely have it in his power to visit Washington this winter. Our friends Green & Peyton talk of taking a flying trip there in a few days.

I can hardly give you a just account of our political move-



ments. The removal of the Deposites & the questions growing out of it are now all the order of the day. I am sorry to tell you that much dissatisfaction exists, much alarm is raised, and the Enemies of the Administration have again an oppt. of crowing over its friends. These *Coups d' Etat* have done us much mischief. The (——) directed against J. H. Pleasants, and the arrest of R. B. Randolph were unfortunate movements, and now this Diplomatic question is cooling the friends & spiring the enemies of the President. Ambitious men & factious parties are seizing upon it to spread disaffection. I was affraid of the results as I wrote you in the summer, and my Views were also laid frankly before the President. I have no doubt he acted from the best motives, but I thought he ought to have waited, at least until the Committee of Congress could have investigated & reported on the misconduct of the Bank. Things would have gone on much smother in that way. And now there is no predicting when the Crisis will pass over and how it will terminate. We must keep our eyes fixed on one point at all events—the dissolution of the Bank. No antipathy of our Enemies must divert our attention from it.

As to the Force Bill about which you ask my opinion, I do not hesitate to say, that as the government has proved itself equal to the emergency for which it was proposed we wish no longer to keep a law upon the Statute Book which is only calculated to fester the feelings & excite the discord of the South, and that therefore, if for no other reason, we vote to rescind it.

It is obvious that the two fragments of the opposition in the Legislature are approaching each other & forming a Combination against the Administration. We see the effect in the election of Governor which takes place tomorrow. It is probable that the Nullifiers will run Tazewell, the Clay men Mr. Watts of Botetourt, & the Administration men will run Daniel. Daniel will probably beat either of them on the first Ballot, but the danger is lest on the second the friends of Watts & Tazewell





may go together. If Watts be thrown out, most of the Clay men will vote for Tazewell, all will not, and the result may depend upon the ratio in which their votes may be divided. I trust in Heaven that Daniel may succeed, but I confess my fears are greater than my hopes.

I think it probable that the threatened debate in the H. of D. may be suspended. The Stockholders of the Bank of Virginia have this day resolved to cancel the Arrangement with the Secy. of the Treasury, and the Legislature may now deem it unnecessary to agitate the Subject.

Things do not go on as smoothly as we wish them, but we must have patience, and still adhere to our principles. We have rumors enough afloat to divide us, but I make it a rule now-a-days not to believe the hundredth part of what I hear. Among the other (———) of the day I have been told of a miserable story afloat that you have expressed a strong desire to bring the *Lynchburg Virginia* to this city, because I can not be prevailed on to toe the mark. I state this thing to you, because I always make it a rule to deal in the most vigorous manner with those who are my friends, & to whom I am a friend.

Do me the favor to write me soon how matters are going on at Washington, and with the kindest Remembrances of all my Family, I am, Dr, Sir,

Yours most truly;

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

White Sulphur Springs, Greenbrier Co. Virginia.

Richmond, Aug. 23, 1834.

My Dear Sir,

I have recd. (yesterday morning) two letters, stating that Gholson addressed the people of Lunenburg, and affirmed that you were an Abolitionist; and that I had the evidence in my possession, in the shape of a letter from Paris, which you



addressed me.—This blow is followed by the Slip from the “Whig”, which appeared yesterday. I state this to you that you may be apprised of what is going on and that you may inform me of your wishes, if you think necessary, upon this subject. Your letter from Paris embraced a variety of subjects, and among them the subject of Slavery, I recollect. I showed it to your friend John Rutherford, and my brother Col. Ritchie; both of whom were *then* members of the Legislature. How any thing about this letter could have transpired I am utterly at a loss to divine. I don’t recollect any other person I showed your letter to. But you must write me as soon as it is convenient, upon the subject.

Our friends in the Lower Country are full of spirit; more so, I suspect, than they are higher up. In some of the counties they will carry Instructions. This morning, for instance, I hear from Southampton. They are already signed there in one day by 200 persons; and no doubt is entertained of their Success.—Our friends must come down in a liberal as well as firm spirit. You will be the first choice of most of them, I have no doubt; but if on comparing noses together, they find you cannot beat Leigh, but that some other can, you will submit I have no doubt with a good grace. However, sufficient to the day be the decision.

We are getting into hot times here. J. H. Pleasants has made an assault upon Daniel, in consequence of writing “Stafford” in last Tuesday’s Enquirer, and being well prepared, get the advantage and hurt him a good deal. The Grand Jury have presented Pleasants for an assault & battery. God knows what we are coming to.

W. H. Roane & his sister, Mrs. Ruffin will set out next week on their way to the Mountains, and perhaps will see you at the Springs. They talk of calling in upon you.

William is at the law. I am sorry he is fallen upon such evil times in politics. *Here* we are in a decided minority. Let



our friends never despair of the Republic.

Write me soon, & believe me,

Most truly yours,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Lindsay's Store, Albemarle, May 19, 1835.

My Dear Sir,

I cordially reciprocate Congratulations with you. It is a victory worth winning. the manœuvre to which the Whigs are resorting to cover this defeat, can scarcely avail them. The eyes of the People are becoming too wide awake not to be able to see that there is but a shadow of distinction between the Whigs and the White whigs. I do not verily believe that the name of Judge White will be much longer competent to conceal their purposes or avert the indignation of the country. If the Baltimore Convention be attended in the force which I anticipate, even Judge White will be compelled to withdraw his name or it will lose all its magic.

Of this splendid victory, few I hope will enjoy more of the fruit than yourself. It is the pretty genaral impression that Mr. Leigh will throw up his office, or rather will not accept it, for there is some mystery about the actual state of the case. And here we are trying by making an issue between the Governor & the Senator to bring the truth out and hasten the *denouement*. In case he resignes, you come in & take your place on the floor of the Senate.

But this may not be all. You know I have carefully forbore touching upon the Vice Presidency. Not a word line or syllable has been exchanged between us on the subject. But I think it high time to tell you (P. P. Barbour being out of the question who in my opinion has superior claims to any one in the Union, on account of his longer services,) that my heart is now set upon your elevation from the Floor to the





Chair of the Senate. I had hoped that the thing was fixed; and had given myself less concern than I ought about it, but I am informed since Friday night that some of our strongest friends at Washington think that Richd. M. Johnson ought to have the nomination, great as they admit your claims to be. What is the desire of Mr. V. B. on this subject I am unable to say; though it seems to me that he would prefer yourself. I will not inform you of all that has passed since Saturday morning. But I have not hesitated, with all the respect I feel for Col. Johnson, to press your name in every way that appeared proper to me. I have this evening written two letters to two of the delegates of the Convention, one from Virginia and the other from the West, and I have also addressed myself to a gentleman at Washington, who can, if he thinks fit, exercise a sort of "potential voice" upon the proceedings of an important part of his Delegation. I am assured by every man that I have seen that you are the favorite Candidate of this state. I think from two of the N. C. Delegation told me you will receive their support. Col. Watkins (ever zealous & efficient) & Col. Morgan, who took the steam Boat on Sunday, will go by way of the Potomac & Washington. Peter V. Daniel has been induced by the emergency of the case to go to Baltimore, and will take Washington in his way. What the result may be it is utterly impossible to guess. I shall be most deeply disappointed if we do not prevail. I have freely told & written my friends that with your name associated on the ticket, I think Virginia & the South will be safe, with Col. Johnson less than safe.

I beg you for the present to say and write as little upon the question as possible. I have no authority now to tell you why. But be content if you receive the nomination, to accept it in a way which you so well know how to express, and if the Cup be unfortunately passed to another lip, to bear your disappointment as becomes you.

My family have mostly gone to Brandon, where I shall follow them on Sunday, by which time I hope our suspense will



be terminated. I need in fact some repose, for the last month was throughout a period of great excitement & great labor, and I must take a furlough for a week.

I write in great haste, my dear Sir, and I wish you may be able to read it. With best respects to Mrs. Rives & your Brother believe me,

Yours truly & warmly

THOS. RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Richmond, June 5, (1835?).

My dear Sir,

I take this liberty of sending you a newspaper, which contains an extract from the London Times—touching you. The Times article I find has been republished in several of the American papers—with more or less of comment—and it really seems to me that if you can give a “satisfactory explanation” as the French say, you had better do so. You may address it in the form of a letter to me furnished on my application directly to you, or send me a paragraph in any shape most agreeable to yourself.

Permit me to ask you, what information, if any you possess respecting the course which France will take in asking her “satisfactory explanation.”—and what is the course which we should take on this subject. We have been beaten at Baltimore—after all that has been done. But we must not divide our party. I hope you will approve the course the Enq. is pursuing in this matter. You, of course will keep perfectly cool—not suffer your feelings for a single moment to move your judgment.

I have no information to give you about Mr. Leigh’s designs. All is dark—the same sort of reserve and mystification prevails as distinguished Mr. Clay’s course while he was deciding how his vote should be given for the presidency before the H of R.—I do not like it—It does not look well. You will



see that the Enq. has broken ground again upon the subject after giving Messrs. Leigh & Tazwell sufficient time to deliberate & to act. The voice of the people must be performed and the principle of instruction must be carried out. What will be the issue, it is impossible yet to say. But still I cannot permit myself to think that Mr. L. will take his seat.

Mr. Stevenson has this day handed to me Mr. Van-Buren's letter for the Committee of the Baltimore Convention. It is written in a fine manly spirit, and will do much good. It declares in the most positive manner, that he has never sought the Presidency nor made any arrangements with mortal man for getting it—and he challenges those who were once his friends and are now his political opponents to produce a tittle of evidence to contradict his declaration. He declares that his opinions are already he presumes sufficiently well known by his own acts or letters, or authorized Declarations of his friends, but still if any doubt should exist he pledges himself to answer any Enquiry that is made in the proper manner. His Eulogium upon the Union of the States & the means to preserve it is very handsome.

I have been visiting Brandon lately and may return there on Sunday for three days more. What watering places do you & Mrs. Rives visit this Season?

I should like to meet you somewhere.

Yours Truly

THOS RITCHIE

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Senate of U. S. Washington.

Richmond, Saturday, (February 25, 1837?).

My Dear Sir,

I have been to see Col. Watkins this morning, who has been very sick with the Varioloid. He is better to-day and takes his usual interest in politics. He says you must come





on to Richmond. He says moreover that you must not quarrel with Col. Benton.

The letter he had written to the Washingtonian was mislaid by the negligence of his Servant, just before he was taken sick. He has found it, however, and intends to forward it.

Cannot Poinsett and Butler both be taken into the Cabinet? Why not go *elsewhere* for an Atty. Genaral. With such a Cabinet we may weather the storm that is brewing.

I feel every way interested in Gen. Jackson's settling honorably the affair of Scott before he goes out of power. Do see Mr. Butler and ask him to have it done. It would redound to the credit of Gen. Scott not less than to the honor of Gen. Jackson. I want him to show that in his conduct to Scott he has been above that petty, private, vindictive feeling with which he has been falsely charged. Every way there is a propriety in the thing, which strikes me forcibly. I have never asked any favor of Gen. Jackson for eight years, and I am almost disposed to ask this as the best or only favor—to act if possible and to act not grudgingly but with the free grace of a generous soldier. If it can be done do drop me a line.

Yours truly,

THOS. RITCHIE

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Private

Thursday Evening Aug. 10, (1837?)

My Dear Sir,

You will of course have seen from the course of the Globe, if you had not *other keys* to unlock the Cabinet, that Mr. Van Buren goes for the coin & the Sub Treasury System. I have thought much and anxiously about it, and I have determined against the opinion of some of my most honorable friends, to go for the State Banks (——) if we *can regulate* them into specie payment in good time. My *opinions* in 34 determined me along with their reasons. But I go first, fore-



most & last against the U. S. Bank—any thing sooner than that monstrous alternative! I will lay open both sides, & let the people judge fairly, asserting my own Views, so as to avoid all split in our party, which will let the (——) into the walls of the Citadel. God knows what course you mean to steer. If you are a wise and prudent man you will not brave the Executive power. It is fearful odds why. But if you think with me then I pray you out in my spirit—above board, but in a liberal and amiable disposition—not provoking friends, not wooing our Enemies. I knew that the President & his Cabinet were going for this system—this evening week, and next morning I said what you saw.

Write me forthwith. Have no (——) from me I pray you.

I have letters from Blair written in the tone I like—friendly, plain & above board. I have nothing to complain of. I must do my duty, if I can see the way.

You will see what I say of (“ ”) to-morrow.

Have you the Debates on Gordon’s Resolution? the Debates on the Rem. Bank Deposites in the Senate, and the Enquirer of Oct. 3, 1834. Read the last. I should like to have the two first

(——) & disappointed, with best regards to Mrs. Rives,

Yours truly,

THOM. RITCHIE

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Senate of U. S. Washington.

Wednesday. (September 20th, 1837?)

My Dear Sir,

Fearing to miss William by the ordinary address (lest he might not call at the P. office) I beg the liberty of putting the enclosed under cover to you. It may be important that he should get it before he leaves Washington. Will you have it sent to him forthwith?



I will write you tomorrow, when I can answer your Query.

I should think, if you all keep cool, the present difficulty may blow off & leave everything smooth. We must not divide and break down the party. I should think that you might all agree upon some plan. It seems to me Calhoun is easing off & even Mr. Benton a little.

What think you of the plan of Special Deposites—See the Enq. of Friday. Even Dr. Brockenbrough says, if there be supposed insuperable objections to the S. Treasury System, the Special Deposit System will work well.

Yours truly,

T RITCHIE

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Richmond, Sep. 21st, 1837.

My Dear Sir,

I am so hurried by my Engagements to-day that I can give you only a short note.

I have applied to Dr. Brockenbrough for information on the point you mentioned. He says "The Virginia Banks, I think, can resume specie payment without danger, by the 20th of Feb. 1838. The South Western States, I learn can not make their crops available fully before the 1st of July. You know the Assembly fixed the 1st of March for us, at least gave us indulgence to that day."

The Banks here are willing to go into a Convention with those Institutions who will join them.—and hence the article which I threw into last Tuesday's Enquirer. I think the Secy. of the Treasury might help the cause, as I do not know of any one who ought to feel greater interest in resumption. Neither Government nor people can get on smoothly, until that object is accomplished.

I hope our friends will be able to agree upon some (——) by compromising where they can.





Should you return to Castle Hill before December, you must on your visit to the University call for my son Thomas, who is now a Student.

Yours truly,

THOS. RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO WILLIAM C. RIVES.

Tuesday Evening, June 5th. (1838?)

My Dear Sir,

On sending to the Powhatan House by sunrise this morning, I find the best of the Birds is flown. Mr. Libby left us yesterday morning, and Mr. Ruggles and the Ladies this morning. Little did I imagine when I parted with them at Dr. Watson's door on Saturday night that it was the last I should see of them. I had arranged with Mr. R. to see him at 11 on Monday to chaperon him to our Canal & Bridge, two of our greatest Levies, but my engagements pushed upon me so (——) that I was compelled to devolve the Commission upon Mr. Bently. The rain too poured down the whole afternoon; and the mail brought me so many indispensable articles to call my attention—documents from Dr. Brockenbrough about the Banks, and a letter from Mr. Hopkins which startled me about the Sub Treasury Bill—that I was occupied the whole day. So that very much to my regret, I saw no more of our charming acquaintances. I am sorry also to understand that Mr. Ruggles saw so little of our City in consequence of the rain. Mr. Libby had taken a 'coup d' Oil of its situation & water power, and expressed himself delighted with its resources and prospects. He declared that not even Rochester itself presented so many advantages for manufactures. Mr. Ruggles did not see as much of it as he did, though he stayed a day longer, but his busy mind was atent engaged on Monday in collecting Statistics of our Internal Improvements. I am sorry for this on every account. He would have appreciated our great though latent resources, advised as how to develope



them, and assisted us in interesting the Capitalists of N. York to turn their attention towards our City. The Ladies too were cooped up in the Boarding-House all day, instead of wandering over our hills & surveying our Landscapes. I should be mortified notwithstanding, if they had not left us with some favorable impressions and if they did not sometimes recollect us. My wife had gone to Brandon but the day before, and Mary Green with her. So that I had it not in my power to offer them even a cup of tea. Present me most kindly to both of them, when you see them, and tell Mrs. Ruggles not to forget my Bronssa? Mulberry. If she will honor me with one I will promise my best endeavour to cultivate the plant and introduce it among my neighbors. I mean to write in the course of the year to my friend Pendicanis, the Greek, and remind him of his promise to send me some of his favorite figs and grapes. Thus America will owe to Clessie Green both "the vine and the fig tree" as well as the Mulberry.

I have been startled, my dear Sir, about this Sub Treasury Bill by the letters of Hopkins and Garland. The information I have received since our Election had contributed to dispel my apprehension. Deceived themselves, my other correspondents had deceived me, so that I had disarmed before the war was over. But Hopkins stunned me yesterday by the fear he expressed and I have again wielded the sword this morning. Can it be possible that this bill can now pass? I am very anxious to visit Brandon & refresh myself amid the beauties of the country; but told my wife that I could not leave my post until the proceedings of Congress would justify my absence. Will *you* not give me a furlough? Are we really in danger from this bill which I thought had long since descended to the tomb of the Capulets? Now that the Banks have done so much to redeem their character, that they have acted so much better than they did in 15 & 16, that instead of multiplying their issues in order to accumulate dividends they have been calling in their paper, in order to redeem their Engagements,—now that they are about to resume and give us a better Currency,



are we about to be threatened again with this great Federal (——) Power? Why not let things quietly alone for the present, and try the State Bank System in another & a better form?

Deeply have I regretted, my dear Sir, that you & I could not agree about the Special Deposite? It would be perfectly satisfactory, I am sure to the great majority of our friends in Va. What Roane (whom I saw too little of); what our friend P. P. Barbour said about it at Judge Nicholas' is truth. Mr. Roane was to my right hand and heard what the Judge said. He remarked in a gay and courteous spirit that he had endorsed no man's (——) for ten years but would endorse the Enq. through and through, upon the Special Deposite &. If you go on in the same System as we had before the Suspension will we not run riot again? I am perfectly willing to trust the Banks with the public money, if they will not speculate upon it—and take their paper, (I mean of the Deposite Banks and those whom they will trust,) provided they will settle up with the gov't on the principle of your (——) and answer for the balance either in specie or available funds. Is it too late to do something of this sort now? You thought the system was impracticable, but I consulted Dr, Brockenbrough & others, and my impressions were exactly the reverse of yours.

But I have bored you long enough. I agree with you entirely about Mr. Calhoun. I have no confidence in him, nor Mr. Clay, *as a politician*.

So soon as you can give some news about the S. Treasury Bill write me, if but a line. I find by the Connecticut papers of to-day, that her two senators are *Instructed* to vote against the bill. Will not this tend to defeat it if it should come back upon your body with the harmony feature vested in it? They surely will not fly in the face of their Constituents.

With great regard, yours,

THOS RITCHIE





THOMAS RITCHIE TO MARTIN VAN BUREN

(strictly confidential)<sup>1</sup>

Richmond, July 2, 1838.

My dear Sir,

I am about to write you a very free letter & have no time to study the graces of composition. I must tell you my tale right straight on. The mail closes within a short time, and it was only within a few minutes past, that upon a long conversation with Dr. Brockenbrough, I have determined to take this mode of addressing you, instead of taking the cars in the morning for Washington. He thought it would be best for me to go on political grounds; but advised me on personal considerations to decline the visit. He said that I would be watched, lampooned, & belittled. But these consideration should not have prevented me, if I had not supposed that the special friends of Calhoun in the H. of R. might suspect the object of my visit, & then set themselves to defeat it.

Sir you ought to know me. From the first moment of my acquaintance with you, I have been your personal & political friend. How warmly I have been so, let my actions speak more than my professions. No man more sincerely rejoiced in your election—no one could have more highly regretted that the first measure of your administration should have called forth my opposition. But I have ever been most anxious to (——) and to compromise this vexatious question. I have spared no pains to bring our friends together. Were any one at Washington, who had the ear of both, with an address and weight of character calculated to enforce his recommendations, I think the matter would have been settled before this. But each side complains that the other will not compromise, and nothing is done.

I wrote to Mr. Balch last Thursday that if I could do any good at Washington, I would cheerfully go on. He gave me no sort of encouragement. I had almost abandoned the whole mat-

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<sup>1</sup>*Van Buren Mss.*



ter in despair, until I received the three letters marked A. B. & C. I trust them to your most sacred honor.

I beg you to read most carefully the letters of Messrs. Rives and Hopkins in particular. Call around you, my dear Sir. your coolest friends, if it be not too late. You know the means of bringing about such results far better than I can advise. Cannot Mr. Poinset approach Mr. Lagare, and thus make a *point d' appui* between the two wings?

If Congress could be induced to postpone their adjournment for a few days, everything might be settled. I beg you in the most emphatic terms to close up this vexatious question now. Read the letter of my friend Rutherford (the Lieut. Governor, and a Sub-Treasury man,) and of Fontaine or amiable, pure & sensible Senator.

I pray you not to listen to the infatuated counsels of those bitter Hotspurs, who advise you to appeal to the polls. Before the fall election the schism in our party may produce the direst results. We shall all be distracted whether Mr. Wright's bill passes or is rejected, we shall probably be beaten, and then a National Bank may be fastened upon us.

Mr. Calhoun is for agitation, agitation. But you know him sufficiently to know how far he is to be trusted for motives and for measures. John P. King has drawn this politician to the life.

I am interrupted. I have no time to pour out the thousand reflections that turn in my brain. Your own sagacity renders it, however, unnecessary.

I entreat you to act and to save our party, as I took the liberty of telling you, through my letter of last year to Mrs. B. in the spirit of a liberal compromise.

Believe me to be, your friend

THOMAS RITCHIE.

(Please return my letters) Dr. Brockenbrough fully agrees with me in all my calculations & he is the only person who knows of this letter.



THOMAS RITCHIE TO BENJ. F. BUTLER?

Thursday, Morning. (No date)

March or April

My dear Sir,

I have been prostrated two days on the bed of sickness, and though I am rapidly recovering, I am compelled to pillow up my head, for the purpose of addressing you on a subject which deeply interests me. Perhaps, I am going too far. Perhaps, I may be taking a liberty which our short acquaintance may not seem to justify. Perhaps, I am too boldly breaking through that state and dignity, that hedge in men of affairs. But, when I recollect the simplicity of character which best adorns a man,—when I recall to mind the cordial terms you used towards me, on the last night I had the pleasure of seeing you, I feel irresistibly impelled to address you upon a subject, which interests me as a friend and as a patriot.

Without further circumlocution, then, I call your attention to the editorial article which appeared in the *Globe*, containing some severe criticisms on the conduct of Andrew Stevenson. It is scarcely necessary to tell you how much pain it has given many of his and the Presidents friends. May I frankly enquire of you, whether it is to be regarded as a true exponent of the President's feelings and sentiments? I well know the solicitude which this article will occasion in the breast of Mr. Stevenson, not only on account of the character of these strictures, but from the source from which they emanated, *the official organ of the government*. You will readily imagine, Sir, how very unpleasant must be his situation, until he shall be apprized of the President's feelings on this subject. You can well conceive too, that if he shall ascertain the article in question to have received the President's sanction, he might feel himself constrained to resign his commission and return home. I feel solicitous that Mr. Stevenson and his friends should be put at ease on this subject, if indeed I am right in the conjecture, that Mr. Blair, without consulting with his official friends, has only given expression to his own opinions, stimulated as they





no doubt have been by the conduct of the agents of the Bank, as well as the insidious comments of the Press on Mr. Stevenson's London letter.

May I call your attention to the few remarks I made in the last *Enquirer*, on the article in the *Globe*? They were written, Sir, I am free to confess to you, under some little embarrassment. While I thought on one hand, that Mr. S. did not deserve the severe strictures he had received, even admitting that he may not have sufficiently weighed the phraseology of his letter,—I could not on the other hand, lose sight of the importance of pressing the harmony of our party, and of maintaining an unbroken front towards our opponents, who are ready to make the most of every division in our ranks, and indeed of every thing which may avail them in the opposition which they seem determined to wage against the Administration. I feel constrained too, by those personal sentiments I entertained towards Mr. Blair, by the recollection of that cordial and confiding kindness, which he had so freely poured out to me, on my late visit to Washington. Of all the articles I had ever seen in a newspaper, I confess to you, the article in the *Globe* had given me the most poignant concern. I liked Mr. Blair—sincerely—ardently. You can then very readily conceive under what feelings I penned my brief comments on this severe stricture. But, Sir, I think myself bound to tell you, that the Republicans in this quarter of Virginia will not sustain the course which the *Globe* has pursued towards Mr. Stevenson. His sentiments in regard to the Bank, the persecution he has experienced from the opposition, and his feeling towards Mr. Van Buren, both politically and personally, and let me add, Sir, (because it is a fact which fell within my own knowledge), the memorable efforts which he made to sustain Mr. Van Buren in the days of *his* trial or persecution, and while others were shrinking from the storm, *his* coming forward, and being one of the most active and determined men to press the rejected minister for the Presidency,—these and other circumstances are too well known, to permit



his friends in Virginia to view with indifference any attempt to strike him down. I will not cavil with you, Sir, about the amount of Mr. S's indiscretion. I will not deny, if you please, that he might have written rather a more prudent letter; because, we now see that the one he has writtten is susceptible of some misconstruction. I will not say, whether taking even the worst view of the matter, Mr. S. ought or ought not to have spoken a syllable about the Bank, and whether if asked at all in the frankest spirit by any gentleman who was preparing to withdraw his funds from America, he ought not to have said, that he did think the Bank would not be put down, an opinion which seems to be countenanced by the Report of the Republican Committee of Pennsylvania.

Admit then that the private letter from London is correct; which I am prepared to deny in all its extent,—admit that Mr. S. has been guilty of some indiscretion, yet does it therefore follow that he was at once to be put under the ban—that there was no other mode of correcting the error?

I have no question that his own letter, which is the only authentic testimony we have before us, *has been* misconstrued. It is perfectly obvious, at least to me, that Mr. S. was not aware at the time he wrote it of the construction that would be placed upon it, both as regards Mr. Rush, for whom I know he entertains the kindest feelings; or the sentiments expressed in Mr. Van Buren's letter to S. Williams, which no man more cordially approved. I attribute the whole style and phrasology of the letter, to the indignation he felt at the article in the Commercial Advertiser, and not as the *Globe* supposes, to any disposition to repudiate either Mr. Van Buren's or Mr. Rush's opinions in relation to the Bank.

On this subject you have no doubt formed your own opinion. And you will pardon me, I trust, for the liberty I take in addressing you at all upon the subject. My own course on this occasion proceeds not only from my regard for Mr. Stevenson, but from the great interests of my party. My feelings for him are certainly very warm, both as a public and private man.



and I feel the strongest desire that he should not suffer in the public estimation. But I am equally solicitous for the union and harmony of the Republican Press, and for whatever course may be most likely to promote the success and prosperity of the Administration. I am but poorly read in the signs of the Heavens, if a lowering storm is not coming on, which may require all our strength and discretion. Our Currency is in a most distracted condition. The spirit of speculation has involved the community in danger and embarrassment. Thousands will fall victims to circumstances, of which they had no presentiment, and over which they could exercise no control. The picture of the distress in this City is already most appalling. The strongest houses, as they were supposed, are bowing beneath the tempest. The Hermans of N. Orleans, the Josephs of New York, the Philips of Philadelphia, and the Warwicks of London have prostrated several of our Capitalists, and our new Bank Bills, admirable as they are in many respects, by abolishing the small notes and requiring  $\frac{3}{5}$  of their Capital to be preserved in gold and silver, are yet calculated to add to the distress of our existing Banks. The Treasury Circular has disturbed the equilibrium of circulation, and by unnecessarily accumulating the Specie in the Western States, will prevent us from eking out the Capital of the new Banks except by heavy drafts on the old. Instead then of extending accommodations, the Banks will be compelled to curtail their Customers. In such a state of the elements the clamor is always directed to the government. The opposition, of course, have seized upon the Treasury Circular. Some of the friends of the Administration who believed it to have been a wholesome measure, originally, have changed their views. They contend a change of circumstances demands a change of policy, that as Mr. Burk said "circumstances are infinite—and infinitely combined, are variable and transcient; that he who does not take them into consideration, is not erroneous, but stark mad, he is metaphysically mad; that a statesman *never losing sight of his principles*, is to be guided by circumstances, and judging







contrary to the exigencies of the moment, he may ruin his country forever." Some of friends also maintain that whatever respect might at first have been due to the Circular of Gen. Jackson, yet a decided voice of both houses had condemned its continuation, and that it is the duty of Mr. Van Buren to consider not so much what had been done by his predecessor, as what would promote the good of the country.

In a word, Sir, it cannot be concealed that the time is not far distant, when from the confusion and turbidness of the elements, we will require all our sincere friends to support us against the common enemy. Union and not discord must become our watchword. If within three weeks from the commencement of the Administration, we have the signs of two important dissensions in our ranks;—if in addition to the *contre temps* of Mr. Forsyth, we are to have such men as Stevenson struck down and sacrificed, men who like him have hazarded every thing for our cause, who have suffered so severely from our opponents, and whose interests and feelings are so naturally and deeply enlisted in the success of the present Republican Administration—what I frankly ask you, are we next to expect? The President's path may be strewn with roses, but it will also have thorns enough.

My intercourse with Mr. Van Buren has been so cordial and confining for ten years past,—my confidence in his good sense and magnanimity, so strong, that I am sure he will excuse me for asking you unreservedly to submit this hasty letter to his inspection. I beg you to consider it in every other respect, as *strictly confidential*. You will best judge what ought to be done. I do not ask for any thing to appear in the *Globe* on this subject. Far from it. I do not even ask the privilege of putting a line in the *Enquirer*. My respect for Mr. Blair forbids that course. All I wish is, to put myself at ease, about the matter, and the immediate friends of Mr. Stevenson; and to put him also at ease. But I will consult your own wishes rather than mine. In a word then, let me assure you, that whatever information you may give me shall be considered *strictly con-*



*fidential*, and that no use will be made of your reply, except so far as may be *expressly allowed* by yourself. Fear not, Sir, that I will trouble you in this way again. I am too well aware of the drafts made upon your precious time, as well as too sensible of the reserve which it becomes me to observe towards yourself to think of repeating this transgression, but on the most urgent occasion.

If I could be vain enough to hope that Mrs. B. retains any recollection of the eccentric Virginian whom she met for the first time in the east Room on the 4th of March, I would add my best wishes for her, as well as those for yourself, from

Yours truly,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO J. H. PLEASANTS.

Richmond, March 31, 1839.

Sir: I seize the first moment I can call my own, to acknowledge the receipt of your Communication. I have never felt a greater disposition to extend any courtesy in my power to the members of the Whig Office. I can say with the most perfect truth, that my intercourse with Mr. Gallaher for the last three months, has been of the most liberal and friendly character. I have seen less of Mr. Moseley; but it has served to remove any little prejudice I once entertained towards that gentleman. Towards yourself, sir, I am free to repeat your own expressions. My "heart is absolutely free from a vindictive or a malignant feeling." You had been separated from the Whig Office for some time past, and every unkind feeling has died away within me. During your late transitory return to Richmond, your Editorial course toward myself has been sufficiently respectful, and was well calculated to produce a similar feeling towards yourself. Under these circumstances, I would have cheerfully extended to you the courtesy you asked in the opening of your letter—if you had confined yourself to a bare reply to the two writers, who have addressed you through the Enquirer. I was



sorry to see you, therefore, taking a much wider sweep—and launching out into a bitter attack upon my own political course for several years past. It brings in also a studied and somewhat severe attack upon the party with which I have been long associated, reviving (what I respectfully consider) the exploded assaults of past days, and reviewing the transactions, that have long since been discussed. I do not very well see what all this has to do with the “Plain man” or with “Curtius”—or with the course of the Whigs towards Mr. Rives, who has, indeed, participated in all these measures. I will frankly tell you, that I feel other objections to publishing the letters you have and are about to address me. I have various other articles before me, which I have in one way or other pledged myself to publish. The long list of the names of the Corresponding Committees—the speeches of Messrs. Botts, Barton, Southall and Smith, upon the Senatorial Election—a letter of Mr. Nicholas of Louisiana, which has been for several days on my table—several communications which have been for many days on hand—the Proceedings of the Legislature—the summary of their Acts, which always occupies a considerable space in my columns towards the close of their session—the replies which may be expected to the Conservative Address and to Mr. Rives’s Letter—my own Editorials—and the current news of the day, &c, &c., call for all the space I can adequately spare during the two next weeks. After the ensuing week, the Enquirer will be rozed to its semi weekly publication—and you are too well aware, how many articles in heat of a contested election are apt to be generated, which will demand much more space than the Enquirer or the Whig can allow to them. How very inconvenient, then, it would be to me to devote at least eight columns to another subject, I need hardly say. Your present letter will make two columns or more—my own comments two more—and the same for the additional letter, which you have promised to send me, &c. But it is not the mere want of room, of which I would have to complain. We are arriving at the end of a very busy session of





the Legislature. My time has never been so much occupied—My constitution has never undergone more wear and tear. I have been engaged all day, and generally until two or three o'clock in the night. I have been not only cut off from the usual recreations of society, but frequently from the pleasures of my own fireside. Just as this arduous session is about to cease, I should be compelled to open a new controversy afresh with you. Publish your attack any where else, and I may answer it or not, as I please—I may say as much or as little as may suit my own conscience or taste.

But come as it were under my own roof, throw it into the Enquirer, with all the force and ingenuity which your attack may carry with it, I would have no alternative. It would put me to more trouble than I am willing to undertake. I should have to look into the dusty records of many years. I should have to analyse your own course, as well as my own—and though I am perfectly satisfied with what I have done, yet it would cost me no little labour perhaps to satisfy others, and hunt up the means for defending myself.—I have recently had enough of this species of warfare, with some of my late Conservative associates, to satisfy my own ambition.

But, Sir, take another view of this subject. My friends have told me repeatedly, that I have already published too many things against myself as well as my party, "from a notion of impartiality (as one of them calls it) which it would be well enough to practise upon, if it were duly reciprocated. But when had the Whig imitated this impartiality? Has it published "the Address", upon which it makes daily strictures? Has it published the Report of the minority of Mr. Wise's Committee? What else has it lately published on the side of the Administration?—Whilst you (says he) has given us Conservative Addresses, &c., and many other things, that are supposed most likely to influence the public mind? It is only wonderful, how the friends of the Administration can get along at all, when the Whigs scarcely see any thing but one side of the question; and every sophism and misrepresentation, which is fabricated, is laid before the other side."



In this connection, permit me to call your attention to some statistics of the party press in Virginia. In Richmond, we are outrated, both in the rapidity of circulation, and in the number of Editors. The Whig appears daily, and except for little more than three months in the winter, the Enquirer appears but twice a week—Here are three blows for one. The Whig has two, sometimes three Editors to assist it—the Enquirer has but one. How would these odds be increased, if you were to come in, take my own batteries and turn them against me? How is it elsewhere? At most of the strong points in the State, the weight of the Whig artillery is decidedly against the Administration. In Norfolk, the Herald has lately taken the field, in a strong, though I do not think, a very liberal style of attack—I speak especially of its Correspondents. There is no political paper in Norfolk to cope with it. The Petersburg Intelligencer has more scope than the American Constellation. On the South side, is the Danville Reporter, “solitary and alone.”—In Lynchburg, the Virginian, conducted with much talent, though I think with less force than it would command, if it were directed by higher and more liberal feelings—is sole master of the field—and its Editor has also some advantages as a member of the Legislature. In the South-west, at Abingdon, the only press is on the Whig side.—In the North-west, the weight of the press is also on the same side.—In the Piedmont country, the Staunton Spectator, and Leesburg Genius of Liberty, has a greater range than the Rockingham Register, and the Shenandoah Sentinel. The Jefferson county Free Press has no competitor in the county. At Fredericksburg, our able and accomplished friend. Blackford, has the whole political field to himself—and along the borders of the Potomac, what ally could you desire more adroit, vigorous and able than the Knight of Snowden, whose fine powers and social virtues are so well entitled to command our esteem, as well as admiration? The weight of the press is indeed all on your side in Virginia—and can you blame me, if I should be somewhat chary of any little influence which the



Enquirer may be supposed to possess? But now, you would very adroitly come in, and spike my guns or turn them against myself!—With the most courteous feelings, therefore, I am constrained to announce in this form my determination not to publish the letter you have addressed me. I appeal to your own magnanimity for my justification.—To save the trouble of returning it to your own hands, I shall deposit it with Mr. Gallaher, and it will await your orders. If you please, your own press will give you the opportunity of criticising my politics, and attacking my course—though I should have been willing to open my own columns to you, if you had been willing to confine your reply to the few simple points which had been made by my two Correspondents. I am, Sir,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO THE SENIOR EDITOR OF THE RICHMOND  
WHIG.

Tuesday Morning, February 18, 1840.

Sir: I might fairly excuse myself for declining the publication of your letter in the columns of the Enquirer, because you have a long bow of your own, with which you might not only defend yourself, but shoot your arrows at myself as well as others. Besides, you must be aware of the relative state of the political press at this time in Virginia. The Whigs outnumber their opponents, if not in votes, at least in newspapers. A daily Whig in this city is assisted by a weekly Yeoman; and a thrice-weekly Enquirer is the only organ which my own party possesses. Under the sense of such a disparity, I might claim dispensation from the insertion of your letter—but as it is short, and does not travel as far out of the record as your pen generally wanders, I feel willing to extend to you the courtesy which you claim. I beg you, at the same time, not to plead this case hereafter as a precedent.

I had no idea, Sir, that the gentle hint which I gave you.







would prove so severe a hit. But your letter shows the "wounded pigeon by its fluttering." It is evident that you feel the force of the blow, though you attempt to evade its force. It struck me at the time I made the remark, that if you allow yourself a *locus* (or *tempus*) *penitentie*, you might surely extend the same charity to James McDowell, which you claim for yourself—especially as he has since displayed so noble and patriotic a spirit in his Princeton speech.

Whether McDowell's and Gen. Harrison's situations be parallel, is left for an impartial country to decide.—The former in 1832, acted under the impulse of the Southampton Insurrection; actuated, as Judge May said on Tuesday last in the H. of D., by the strong force of public sentiment. Gen. Harrison, exempt from all these immediate impulses; unaffected by any such current of public sympathy, came forward in 1833, to make propositions for appropriating the whole surplus of the Federal Treasury, to the purchase and colonization of the slaves. He was an effective Abolitionist; and was placing at their disposal, all the surplus revenue of the U. States. He had not the slightest scruple about the Constitutional power of Congress—but advances a doctrine, which startles every friend of limited construction. He does not insist upon an amendment of the Constitution, in the usual form, with the concurrence of three-fourths of the States—but asks only for "the consent of the States holding the slaves.—It is true, that in his Vincennes Speech of 1836, in the midst of the war, which the Northern Fanatics were waging against us, the General dealt some hard blows against the Abolitionists, but he does not retract his proposition of 1833. He still admits, indeed, that "the consent of those who are immediately interested" can give Congress the power to act. Mr. McDowell, on the other hand, never made such extravagant propositions as Gen. H. suggested in 1833. His Letter, read the other day to the H. of D., now expressly declares, that he is "Anti-Abolition". For the life of me, therefore, I can not see the "hypocrisy" which you affect to have discovered. But independently of the revela-



tions, for which we are indebted to Gen. Harrison's own pen, there are circumstances which mark him out as the Abolition Candidate. He owed his nomination at Harrisburg very materially to an influence of that character. He did not originally receive a single vote from a Slave State. The movements too now going forward in N. York, show the artful effort that is made to enlist the Abolitionists in his support. The resolutions of John A. King in the Legislature of N. York, and the decided tone of the Whig official journal at Albany, speak a language which cannot deceive any impartial citizen of the South. What do they show, indeed, but a systematic and artful attempt to unite the Abolition Interest with the Whig candidate, and turn the scale in N. York by the vote of this fanatic crew? We have besides new indications from Ohio—as appears by the following extract from the Columbus Statesman, of the 10th inst. Read for yourself, Sir, and judge of the spirit in which the Abolitionists are moving in that quarter.

“Hon. Benj. Tappan—Abolition.—Every Democrat in the State will read with unbounded admiration the speech of our aged and venerable Senator, Benjamin Tappan, in our columns to-day. The Globe truly says that ‘his views are remarkable for their originality, and his style for its condensation, simplicity, and clearness.’ Our correspondents are highly complimentary, and from those two, whose judgments are worth much to the public. The Globe containing the speech arrived yesterday, and to-day the enquiry is generally—‘have you read Judge Tappan’s speech?’ It has been the occasion of more good feelings and compliments than any speech delivered recently, because it is on a subject of more than usual interest at this time to the people of Ohio and of the Union, and in a spirit of candor and cogency that carries conviction to every heart.—Let male and female—old and young, read and ponder it—they will there find the true and sober advice of an aged patriot and statesman. At this moment, while Abolitionism is rearing its haggard head anew under the auspices of



Gen. Harrison—and the base and dastardly coalition is daily strengthening between the two—while Abolition lecturers and the Whig orators can scarcely be distinguished by the public, and the incendiary labors of the two are at work in aid of each other—this speech—this noble stand of a statesman whose age and talents, and long life of public service, gives weight to all he utters, comes at this time upon the enemy like an avalanche, burying the puny intrigues of Harrison and incendiaryism in one common grave together.

“Mr. Preston, who was so highly complimented by the last State convention held here by the Federal party, we are proud to see by his generous eulogies of Judge Tappan, has rebuked most justly and severely the incendiary and abolition spirit of his party that is now better known as the Abolition party than any other; for it seems to be the only distinctive character they now bear, as they have repudiated all other constitutional questions as at direct issue.

“As a proof of what is going on in Ohio, we will state that the Abolition papers, the Elyria Atlas—the New Lisbon Aurora—the Xenia Free Press, have all within a few days hoisted the Harrison flag, but omit the name of any Vice-President. They dare not put up Tyler, but go the electoral ticket that will vote for him.

“In addition to this, the Philanthropist of Cincinnati, of the 4th inst., has more than three columns for the purpose of making Gen. Harrison what he should be for the support of the Abolitionists, and proving by Harrison’s own showing that he was an Abolitionist many years ago and belonged to a society as early as the 18th year of his age. The object of these things cannot be mistaken. Let the friends of the Union therefore be up and doing in time. This question must be met openly, firmly and without delay.”

I have before me, one of the papers named in this extract. It is the Xenia Free Press of the 8th. It flies from its mast head the flag of “Wm. H. Harrison.”—It is an Abolition paper; and one of the first articles under the Editorial head, is a dissertation upon the “Harrison Meetings” in Ohio; among which,







is the meeting in Geauga county; on which it comments in the following style:

"When the conflict between Masonry (and Anti-masonry was at its highest pitch, Geauga county furnished one of the strongest and bravest regiments in the Anti-masonic army. In the last battle fought in the county, Anti-masonry came off conqueror.—Abolition, too, another political heresy, in the estimation of some, is embraced by many of the citizens of Geauga county. It was in that county that the State Ant-Slavery Society held a meeting last fall which was very numerously attended. A knowledge of these facts impressed us with the apprehension that a part at least, of the Harrisburg nomination, would not be acceptable to the citizens of Geauga county. But we are agreeably disappointed. We find on looking over the names of the officers, the committees and the speakers of the meeting, some of the most prominent names in the Anti-masonic and Abolition ranks. At the head of the committee to prepare an address to the people is L. S. Rice, editor of the Painesville Telegraph, formerly editor of the Ohio Star, among the first and most efficient of our Anti-masonic papers. Among the speakers on the occasion was B. F. Wade, of Ashtabula county, a name well known to Abolitionists."

Gen. Harrison is therefore made by the force of circumstances, if not by his own revelations, the Abolition Candidate. No Southern man ought to support him, unless his shirts are cleared of this objection. Will you, Sir, or will your Whig Convention, which is to assemble in this city, on the 24th, assist us in obtaining from him the only information which can satisfy the South? Will you ask from him the pledge, that his Competitor has solemnly given? Will he pledge himself to veto any bill in favor of the abolition of slavery which may be presented to him for his signature?—Henceforth, I say in the most unqualified manner, that the South should support no Presidential candidate, who does not give an unequivocal pledge.

I will not complain of the injustice which you have done



me—but certain it is, that I have never gone as far as your Presidential Candidate; nor even as far as yourself. I went in 1832 for “doing something,” but reprobated the manumission of slaves, without the consent of the owner, or paying for them.—On this subject, I shall be perfectly content for you to dish up my articles, if you would only lend me the File of the Whig to dish up your own. I ask no more, however, than that you should dish up your praises of McDowell’s Speech.

You ought to be the best judge, Sir, of your own duties; and in a case of fair dealing towards another, where you have transgressed as much as the man whom you abuse, “the Patient ought to minister unto himself”—but I should think with due respect, if you had told your readers, that you once lavished your praises upon the very speech of McDowell, from which you are now making such panic quotations, it would have manifested a stronger disposition to do some justice to him, if not to his friends. than the course of the Whig has displayed. I drop, however, this unprofitable contest, and remain,

Respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO (—————?) . . . . .

Richmond, August, 30, 1841.

Sir,

I pray you to accept my thanks for the slip you enclosed me from the Boston Courier, and the comment you suggested. I have adopted your suggestions, as my own.

I forward you the original of the Marietta paper from which I have made an extract in this morning’s Enq.—It contains the whole correspondence between Mr. Ewing & Mr. Baker. Should Mr. Botts & Co. carry out their threats against Mr. Tyler, I take it for granted, the Democrats of the H. R. will be found rallying by you & Gilmer, & in his defense. One of them (as you will see by his quoted statement in to-day’s



paper) has pledged himself to stand by Mr. Tyler. Indeed I presume there will be champions enough in the field to beat back the invaders. But you will find such facts as are stated in the Marietta paper of very important bearing in defining Mr. T's position & making his defence.

In connection, I beg leave to call your attention to the singularly clear & able exposition I have copied from the Albany Argus. I *guess*, that it bears the superscription of Mr. S. Wright. I have not seen anything more satisfactory.

The article from the "Pennsylvanian" gives a fiscal project, which, it is said, Mr. Tyler means to recommend at the ensuing session I take it for granted, it is the same scheme, which my correspondent from Washington (in a letter received this morning) attributes to you & Gilmer & Mallory & Hunter, viz.

"The mints to be authorized to receive deposits, & to grant certificates. Surplus amounts over 3/4 of Collector's bonds, to be deposited in mints, or in 2 or 3 Agencies at other convenient points, the revenue to be collected in coin, certificates of deposit, Gov't dues, or notes of specie-paying Banks:—the Banks to be settled with weekly, and nothing but specie paid out by the Government."

My correspondent writes me that this project will probably be substituted at the present session. It would at least have the advantage of showing that Mr. Tyler's friends are able and willing to suggest some substitute for the Administration of the finances, and to call the public attention to its consideration, and prepare the country for some action at the ensuing session.

I will dismiss all apprehension about Mr. Tyler's course on any Bank bill, which may now be submitted by the Clay Clique. I hope that he will prove himself worthy of the *proud* State to which we belong. But if he does now knuckle to aspirants & hotspurs, who are attempting to "head" him and to "fasten" him by their insidious devices, then indeed, is his glory eclipsed, the reputation he has just won by his firmness will be gone, and his political days will be numbered. As for





the Democratic Party of this "unterrified Commonwealth", they will blanch not and quail not. They will contend with new & indomitable spirit under the banner which Mallory has displayed. They will still "glory (with you) in the name of Abstractionists, and confident of the issue, will appeal only to the old Republicans to *Rally*."

I am advised by a correspondent that "Distrust" has been pouring its leprous distilment "with no sparing hand"; and that rumor tells of one of the Senators of Virginia availing himself of opportunities to infuse jealousy into the President's ear, and urging on him the policy of compromising with the Whigs. My correspondent adds that "Measures have been taken to disabuse the President's mind, and it is evidently proper to assure him of *what is the fact*, that in sustaining with good faith his old Republican principles, he may rely with perfect confidence upon the defence and support of the Republican Party." These assurances came with the greater force, because they are disclosed to me, (without the slightest expectation that any echo from them should go back to Washington,) by a man of the sternest stuff & of the staunchest principles, in all the Virginia delegation.

I address you, Sir, this letter of "shreds and patches" in great haste and without any preparation. May I conclude with asking you, in case I should be mistaken in Mr. Tyler's position, and he means to strike his colors to the Whigs, to drop me one line to warn me of my mistake. This week is big with weal or woe to my country. If I count too confidently on Mr. Tyler's pertinacity, let me frankly know at once, and prepare me for the worst. If there be a man in Congress who knows his thoughts, I am sure it must be you. But do not think I am "eavesdropping" or "dogging" you. If you are not at liberty to tell me honorably what you know, I ask no reply.

Respy. yours,

THOMAS RITCHIE.



THOMAS RITCHIE TO CHARLES CAMPBELL,

Richmond, April 6, 1842.

My Dear Sir,

I take the liberty of opening a correspondence with you in these eventful times. "Centinel must answer to Centinel," until the contest is over. I wish for some information. Can you give it to me? I have written to my friend Martin to know how things are going in Dinwiddie—for, we are told, the Whigs are making a desperate push for that county. Can you tell me how the land lies in Southampton—and ditto in Nottoway. I have good accounts from the former—not so good from the latter, that is to say the Whigs are crowing about Nottoway. Please write me how matters are going on in them & other counties, from which you may have heard. Perhaps Mr. Garland can inform you about Dinwiddie—and Mr. French about Southampton.

The Whigs are rallying upon the Distribution Fund, which is but another name for an increased Tariff—and I am told they have come out in Petersburg for a Protective Tariff. I am happy to see you hunting them upon that issue, with so much spirit & success. I shall consult your columns upon that subject with great interest, and now and then copy from you, when I can find room, but we are really so much crowded that I want *space* almost as much as I want money. We have much to do before the 4th Thursday—many humbugs to dissipate, many insidious appeals to overthrow. I am giving up a large portion of my paper to Distribution—that being the foundation hope of the Whigs.

The Central Committee will make a final Address to the People about Friday the 15th, which will give us time to reach all the State.

So far as I am advised the prospects are cheering. I have the strongest hope of our carry Albemarle, Hanover & Fairfax—the Senator in the Louisa District—besides saving Buckingham, Caroline, & the Senator in Matthews. I have no ac-



counts to rely on from Stafford or Essex. If Bird shall be elected from K. & Queen, he is, as you will see from to-morrow's Enquirer, safe for us, against the Whigs. At all events we must forbear, and not assist the policy of our Adversaries.

Have you any account from Norfolk County?

I cannot doubt from what I hear, that our family quarrels in the Botatort District will be made up. In a word, there is nothing to damp, but every thing to animate us. And there is that in the late policy of the Whigs, their (——) perseverance in Distribution, their growing attachment to the oppressive Tariff, &, &. which is calculated to bind the masses to our party and its principles.

I should not be surprised next to see them boldly coming out for a general Assumption of the State Debts. This is the next step in their wild career. They will say "You (the people) have accepted your share of the proceeds of the Public Lands—but as it is now coming in too slowly by dribblets, and as we do not want to force the lands into market, when they do not sell well, we will create 100 millions of 3 per cent stock, and distribute it among you, to do with as you please—this stock to be based upon the public lands." Indeed, Sir, to tell you the truth, I should be surprised at no act of infatuation, which some of the Federal Whigs may fall into. They seem either not to understand our Institutions, or to disregard them.

I am sorry to bore you with so hurried a Hyeroglyphical (——— ———) as this (——) and am

Respy. yours

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO SILAS WRIGHT.

Richmond, March 20, 1844.

My dear Sir,

At the hazard of being considered the greatest bore of Christendom, I send you the following extract of a letter I received from Washington last night.

March 17—"The Texas question is destined to succeed. I think the treaty when made will certainly be ratified. (———)





Tomorrow evening a decisive article will appear in the *Globe*. Gen. Jackson is most heartily with us, and *will go the whole*. He is the originator of this movement and *will see it through*. Unless forced to do so we must not make this a party question. Unless there is great imprudence or folly, Van Buren will be reelected, but if he goes against Texas (which I deem impossible) all is gone."

I would send you the original, but it is marked "confidential!" The written is a member of Congress and a friend of Mr. Van Buren. Be so good as to consider its contents as confidential, with the reservation only, that if you think it best, you may communicate them to Mr. V. B. I leave that disposition of them to your own discretion.

I do not wish you to answer this letter.—I earnestly beg you not. If you do I will not write you again. You have trouble enough to encounter.

Judge Daniel has favored me with a perusal of your correspondence about the Judgeship. I cannot forebear offering you my heartfelt tribute of thanks for your conduct. Your example is so rare in this office-hunting and greedy age, that it is honourable to you as it is extraordinary.

With best regards,

Yours truly,

THOMAS RITCHIE.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO MARTIN VAN BUREN.

Richmond, May 5, 1844.

My dear Sir,

I have refrained from writing you a single letter, during the present campaign, and I deeply regret that the first one I should have to write would be one, which gives me as much pain to write, as any which ever came from my pen. I need not tell you Mr. Van Buren the feelings which I entertain toward you. Trusted at all times with a kindness, a liberality, and a distinction beyond my merits, I have conceived a sentiment toward you, which partook not more of confidence in you as a politician, than of attachment to you as a man.



I have received from you a hundred evidences of good feeling, which have left a reciprocal impression upon my heart. But I will not dwell upon particulars, nor will I deal in any profusion. You must know me well enough to believe that unnecessary.

The last ten days have produced a condition of political affairs, which I did not believe to be possible. I am compelled to come to the conclusion that we cannot carry Virginia for you. We have lost I now believe the joint vote in the Legislature! We have ten majority in the Senate, it is true—but in the H. of Delegates, where we had a majority of 16 at the last session, the Whigs have now a majority of 12. But I do not attach so much importance to this Revolution as some of my friends. I have recovered from the temporary panic which is so natural with such circumstances. I assure you I do not write you under the influence of any feeling, which might cloud my judgment. But I write you under the effect of what I have heard from my friends and what they write me about our prospects in November next.—Judge for yourself, Sir.—If I did not know that you were a man of honor, I would not put the enclosed letters in your hands. Read them, my dear Sir, but don't preserve their names, take no copies of them, but return me the originals. I will have no half confidence with you. Some of them are my best friends. I trust them in your hands, for I know you will not abuse the confidence I am now reposing in you. Read them and judge for yourself. I am most anxious to spare your feelings, if I can, but I owe to you, as my friend, as the friend of our great Principles, to let you see what others have trusted to me, that you may determine for yourself.

Whom we can get to supply your place, I know not, if you retire. You will see what my correspondents say upon that point. I can only tell you, that Mr. Calhoun's friends solemnly disclaim any wish to run him—that I have solemnly protested and will protest against any such idea, & that I am actuated by no other motive under Heaven, than a desire to possess you of the Views which these letters express. It is



the same opinion, which is entertained by gentlemen as staunch republicans as any in the state, who are around me, who have been late and are your personal and political friends.

I have made a very few memoranda of some of the letters, to explain the location and character of the writers. Those marked A. came to me this morning.

It would be most desirable to stop as soon as possible the jarrings which are going on at Washington. If they go on a few days longer they will break up our party, and insure beyond the probability of a doubt the triumphant election of the most profligate politician perhaps in our country. Is it not surprising as well as distressing to see our worthy and distinguished friends at Washington wrangling with each other, at a time like this, when we have been beaten in Virginia, and when the insulting spectacle of so many thousands at Baltimore has just passed before us. They met together to band together with bands of iron, this strong party in favor of this strong and reckless man, and then our own friends at Washington wrangling with each other, and weakening our strength and depressing our hopes at a time like this?

God forbid! my dear Sir, that I should pretend to dictate to your superior judgment, or even to advise you.

I can truly say that I had set my heart upon nothing more sincerely than to see you re-elected, and through you our wronged party too righted, and if you should become the nominee of our party, I will do all I can for you and against H. Clay.

I see some scribler has written from Washington to the N. Y. Herald, declaring my opinion that you must be dropped. It was, I presume from a very hasty letter written by me to Gen. Chapman, who asked about the state of our elections. My friend Chapman I suppose, spoke of the letter which "I have saw", but which rumor has idly made more of than it expressed.

I ask and desire no answer to this hasty letter.

Yours with great respect,

THOMAS RITCHIE.





## LETTER OF JOHN BROCKENBROUGH TO ANDREW STEVENSON.

Richmond, April, 5, 1834.

My dear Sir,

I have not had the pleasure to hear from you since I last wrote to you. I have no personal acquaintance with Mr. Taney nor with any members of the finance committees of the two houses & therefore take leave, through you, to offer a suggestion which if acted on by Congress will be usefull. Specie is flowing rapidly into the Country in the form of *Mexican dollars*, but they are not now a legal tender as "Spanished milled dollars" are. From the prepossessions abroad the latter bear a small premium here for exportation, while they are not intrinsically worth more (if so much) as the Mexican dollars. Thus while our gold coins and Spanish milled dollars are leaving the Country we have little else of *legal money* to circulate than our own half-dollars, which are not sufficient for the demands of the country. Why not then make Mexican dollars a legal tender for a limited period? I have compared them with the S. milled dollars and find them rather heavier, & from the very imperfect assay I have been enabled to make, I think them at least as pure as to the metal. When the Bank of the U. States begins (which assuredly will be ere long) to demand specie of the State Banks, it will refuse to receive the Mexican Dollars in payment & we shall be in a dilemma, from which we might be relieved by a very short act of Congress. We are receiving specie from N. Orleans and have the offer of abundance of it from France in the shape of Mexican dollars & five Franc pieces, either of which is (————) by law. Do then, I pray you, contrive to have this little affair carried into operation to protect us from the deadly grasp of the Bank of the U. States. The mint can ascertain & fix the value of these foreign coins, & surely the government is bound to



facilitate in every way it can the metallic medium by making the circulation of them legal, until the mint can furnish an ample supply of our own coins. Why the relative value of gold has not been increased I cannot understand. That must be done before the circulation of small Bank notes can be dispensed with.

We are in a state of inexpressable anxiety about the result of the elections now going on. There will be a large majority of anti-bank men elected, but I *fear* the Nullifiers and Clayites combined will also make a majority. It seems impossible to work up our party to the point of laying aside their little local concerns & often by that means one of the enemy will get in. Sometimes, too, there is more than one candidate on our side, when the opposition men always combine on one only.

I write in haste & am ——— truly,

JOHN BROCKENBROUGH.

P. S. Can't the Treasury give us a little help at Norfolk? The U. S. office there is very ill natured towards our office. Elsewhere we do very well. We had to pay off the crew of the John Adams in specie & the U. S. office chuckled very much at it & seems determined to pinch our office as much as possible by collecting all the notes it can get from all quarters.



## LETTER OF C. W. GOOCH TO PRESIDENT VAN BUREN, 1835.

(Confidential)

My dear Sir,

I believe that the great Majority of the people of this State are firmly attached to the person and policy of the President. But the Aristocracy, both of Birth and of Money *hate* him and yourself with a rancour, of which you can form no idea. They even extend this feeling to your friends. They have made violent efforts and are preparing to make still stronger attempts to put us all down. No art, no intrigue, no deception, no slander will be unemployed. Such efforts have already produced surprising charges. The election of Mr. Tazewell, a Nullifier, and all his life, a fishy politician; the doings of our legislature; the efforts to ferment the public mind and procure the committal of prominent men, in different parts of the State, will give you some idea of what may be looked for. With these appearances I am greatly dissatisfied—and I must confess, that I attribute no small share of the blame to our friend Ritchie. The President has nobly done every thing in his power to sustain the principles of the Jeffersonian School; risking his glory and his laurels in the good cause. Yet, the Enquirer has thrown cold water on every prominent and efficient measure of the Administration; Its *doubts, difficulties* and *conscientious objections!* have proven more injurious than all the abuse and slang-whanging of all the opposition presses put together. I see Mr. R. but seldom—when I do, my remonstrances have a temporary effect. But you know that he has no knowledge of *men* and has been crowded with business and family arrangements. I quit the paper as soon as Gen. Jackson's first election was known; because I was worn down with mental and bodily exertion, and had no hope of getting credit for my labors, or of getting along harmoniously. When Mr. R. found that I was positively determined to leave





the paper, he proposed, in writing, to surrender the absolute Control and management of the Editorial department to me. Now as events have turned up, I am sorry that I quit. I was prompted to it, as well by the independence of my pecuniary circumstances, as by that of my mind and sentiments. Still I erred! The Republican party has been doubled into fragments, and the free principles I so much admire, are becoming a Sacrifice to the Cabals of two *Catalines*, two Antipodes—Clay and Calhoun. And, for myself, in addition to the *proscription & persecution* which have hunted me, and villified me in the obscurity of retirement—I had the misfortune to think that there was some *principle* in the Old World—that after the late French Revolution, a general war must take place—and, under this conviction, I was induced to embark with a mercantile gentleman in a flour Speculation, by which I have lost a considerable sum, and brought on my head a debt, for which I must sell property. I dislike the *loss*, it is true. Perhaps it may benefit me by compelling the sale of one of my five little farms, and putting me to *industry* again. But, if I had been otherwise employed, I should have “Kept to my last”. I am now disposed to retrieve this loss by hard work, and steady perseverance.

I fear, my dear Sir, that this letter of “Egoism” will be tedious, if not disgusting to you. But, it is proper that you should see the *whole* ground of my action. The life I lead is too lazy; though I spend more of my time in *writing* than in any other way. I find myself wedded to *politiks* more than to my farms, two of which I have not seen for seven years, tho’ within one day’s travel.

I have been to Mr. Ritchie and his family—a *friend*—a *brother*—a *child*—a *Father*—a *Benefactor*. He knows it—he feels it! On several occasions I have had the bread of his five children in my hands! During the Session of our Convention, the whole of Eastern Virginia (including some of his nearest relations,) were exasperated at his course. They were determined to destroy him & his press—Deputies from many counties came to Richmond; the Members of the Convention and of



the Legislature and others had Meetings or Caucuses—they understood one another—and appointed a large Committee of *Management* to get up a press they could support. That Committee had several meetings to select an Editor. *My name* was promptly brought forward; but two personal friends told the Meeting that they would vouch for my declining any offer they could make; that I stood peculiarly related to the Enquirer; the Editor of that paper was my *friend*, and owed me \$10,000. (*which he has since paid*) for my interest in the paper—that independent as I was, and this debt over Mr. R.'s head & my intimacy & good feeling with him & his family, it was impossible for me to think of the proposition; and, the more especially, since I had quitted the paper but a short time & could take it back & control it, if I thought proper. They then looked out for another; but they could not agree upon any man; and insisted that my friends should make the proposition, and assure me that within ten days, \$10,000 should be paid to me in money, the price for 2000 subscriptions; that they would contribute original matter and make such exertions as should insure unprecedented success to the paper. These propositions were accordingly submitted to me. I could give but one answer. *No.* But seeing the course things *must take* in the Convention, and that the excitement about the *white-basis* would soon subside, I gladly seized the opportunity of preventing the enlistment & pledged devotion of more than half the State, in a crusade against the Enquirer, and the more especially when I saw that *Calhounism* was the next great object of the leaders in this business. Under *these circumstances*, I asked 8 or 10 days to think of the matter & make my decision; going, *at once* to Mr. Ritchie & telling him to quiet his alarms, repeating all the circumstances (but *names*) and informing him what was my predetermined decision, & my motives for delay. Mr. R. was truly alarmed, but my frank declarations transformed him into a moving shadow over the room. His tears witnessed the sincerity of his declaration when he said if *I* would not embark in such a scheme, he *defied* any other man. It was a critical time in the fortunes of his paper. The eighth



or ninth day after, when Gordon's compromise had been adopted in the Convention, and the minds of men had been freed of an excitement of which I partook like others, since my property was likely to be taxed by men who had no *property*, etc—when I saw the calm so rapidly succeeding the tempest, I made my decision in form, and communicated with the Committee. I protested against throwing the Enquirer Overboard, because Mr. *Ritchie* was in favor of the white basis; that it was a paper more devoted to federal politics than any thing else; that upon almost every other point *that far* he had gone with *lower* Virginia—that the Convention would soon adjoin with a Constitution which the people would ratify, & we should be thrown back upon federal politics in all our political movements—and that in these respects I was not aware of any difference in mine and Mr. R.'s opinions. I explained the *personal* relationship and connection between us, & the impropriety at *that time* of my setting up a new paper. But, that whenever Mr. Ritchie did not support the Administration of Gen. Jackson as he ought; whenever he showed a leaning to either Clay or Calhoun, or to their opposite policies, then I would embark under such flattering offers, and apply myself again to what I knew to be the most slavish, the most disagreeable nay, revolting employment. The *Managers* in this Matter, including my personal friends, were then Covertly and are now ardent Calhoun Men & Nullifiers. To such men my answer was *decisive*. In the meantime, the friends of the Administration had become satisfied with the Compromise in the Convention, & their ardour for a new paper had cooled down. As you may suppose, the subject was dropped for a time. I had anticipated this result. The little Calhoun party, however, being thus foiled rallied after a while upon their own supposed strength, and set up the Jeffersonian Republican; which found a circulation only on the south side of James River & in some of the Calhoun States. It proved a losing business, tho' it struggled on until this winter when the Coalition between Clay & Calhoun caused its amalgamation with the Whig. The hostility to the Enquirer has been kept up, and has increased so







much that Mr. R. was near being ousted as public printer. His enemies are confident of success at the next Session, & I fear will succeed. Many of the cordial friends of the Administration voted against him on account of the milk & water course he pursues. He was, in fact only saved by the Clay men and old federalists who are afraid of Nullification.

I fear that I have tired you by this long letter about *myself*. I have written with absolute unreserve & with the utmost confidence that you will understand and appreciate my motives; and that after reading this letter *burn it*. I do think that something is necessary to be done to save Virginia from falling into the pit, cunningly prepared for her by a body of double faced politicians. You know the intercourse which all public officers are obliged to have with the people, and the facilities they enjoy to impart their own political sentiments. With but one or two exceptions all the federal and state officers among us are in deadly hostility to the President & yourself—tho' your principles accord with those they profess to maintain. This is an uphill sort of business I assure you; and, the more especially, as we have no press that takes what, in my opinion, is the proper course. Under these circumstances what is to be done? I am willing to put my shoulder to the wheel in some way or other. But how? Essays in the press do good, and I shall not abandon their employment. To establish a new paper under the *Union* flag, exceeds my means; brings us in conflict with the *Enquirer*, which not having committed itself, may be lost; and its acknowledged character and influence; its circulation of about 4000 sheets throughout the whole Union, and its ample resources, would make the loss most sensibly felt. Perhaps, no talent or industry could repair it, so far as Virginia is concerned. My embarrassments prevent me from purchasing back an interest in that paper, and thereby, securing to myself its control. If there were a vacancy in the office of Collector or Post-Master in Richmond, I should present my name to the President to fill it, under an expectation that its income would support my family; and that my constant presence in Richmond, and association with Mr. R. would, with



some effort, answer the same purpose. Tho' not included in Mr. R.'s protestations against taking office, I have not asked patronage from the Government; for until now, my circumstances would have justified my waiving its voluntary tender, in favor of those, capable & deserving. The hypothesis here suggested would be subject to the objection that Richmond is decidedly in the opposition. My policies upon every other subject except the late State Convention, have been opposed to those of its most influential citizens, and to a majority of the whole. Nor do I know by which party, the Clayites or the Calhounites, I am most cordially *hated*. The many close & severe examinations which I have made thro' the press, of the pretensions and conduct of these desperate men, will never be forgiven. Their malignity has, hitherto, but given new vigor to my pen. Nor, in any event, should I regard it other than as a complimentary testimonial in my favor. The reason why a majority of the people in Richmond are so prejudiced is, that all the influence of office, & nearly all the prominent talent of the place have been zealously employed to produce this result. Mr. Daniel, is perhaps the only prominent man who speaks his mind freely or takes any pains to put things in their proper light; and he is too much employed to mix enough with the people.

In our legislature, the weight of talent is against us; and as to management our friends have none of it. Witness the proceedings on several subjects. The least tact, the least concert, the expression of an independent opinion from the press, editorially, would have saved us the mortification of having Mr. Tazewell saddled upon us for three years. He has been a federalist in truth all his life—is a Nullifier—and indulges himself in giving expression to the most violent feelings of hostility to the Administration. He has a *reputation* for talent & purity which I really do not think he possesses so pre-eminently over other men; all of which will be exerted in doing *Mischief*. That he will be successful to much extent, you can but anticipate.

Now, my good Sir, how are all these consequences to be avoided. Are we to make no exertions to ward them off? I



am sure that the luke-warm & the equivocating are *against* us. Look at our friend Archer! In the Baltimore Convention I saw which road he was destined to take, if the President refused to send him to England, on which he set his heart: and my opinion was confirmed when I got to Washington and saw his fawning, his choaking anxiety, & that Stevenson was his competitor. The *latter* gentleman, *entre nous*, does not possess in my opinion, either more *sincerity* or *constancy* than any other man in the world. He was near bolting because he was not put into the first *Cabinet*; but when that exploded & a new one was cast, he was outrageous at his *exclusion*, and talked to me hours about *Virginia principles* & the necessity for a representative of them in the Cabinet. I put down most of it to his *vanity*, by which he may be *led* anywhere, notwithstanding his *mother wit*, & intuitive shrewdness. He has, by his *blustering* manners; his apparent *frankness* & *independence*, and mixture with mankind as a deputy County Court Clerk, lawyer, Member of Assembly & of Congress & speaker of both, acquired great knowledge of mankind, as well as of the facilities of getting over difficulties, and glossing over what he is not prepared to discuss or explain. He has some influence in this State; but much less than is supposed. After all, he has many good qualities—and if you do not mortify his *vanity*, is a useful man in whatever cause he embarks. Great efforts were made to turn him out of Congress, and it required equal efforts to prevent it, and show our strength in this District. If Mr. S. goes to London, we must send W. H. Roane, whom we can elect by *hard work* against Richmond, New Kent, & Ch. City (I mean by *we*, Henrico & Hanover) *He* rather a non-descript, tho' a good Democrat, and not the first choice of many who will vote for him & like him very well.

I have concluded to send this letter *sealed* to our friend Mr. Cambreling, thro' whom it will reach your hands; (and to whom, if there be any proprietary in doing so you, may show it, before you burn it.) Some friendly as well as political correspondence has taken place between Mr. C. & myself—any thing you may think proper to say, in reply, for obvious reasons, had better come under his envelope, or from his pen.







It is necessary to begin to look ahead, if we have confidence in our ability to dispense with the *Golden Collar* of the Bank of the U. S. Perhaps, there may be no impropriety in your writing yourself, when I assure you that the same destination will be given to your letter that is asked for this—accident may throw a frank communication like mine into hostile hands, when there is nothing in it I would not avow, if proper to do so. Still I would not have *my* opinions of our friends Archer and Stevenson, unnecessarily made known, either to themselves or the public—nor would I wish all the facts stated to you in relation to Mr. Ritchie or even myself, made known, or *hazarded* to be seen. Not, that any are untrue or unjust—but because it might be *fuel* for the smallest spark of *fire*. My correspondence my *every movement* is watched. With my friend Jno Campbell, as you know there has always existed, for 20 years, a familiar intercourse. We have roomed & slept together—and have been *friends* ever since our first meeting. I could give you his portrature without a failure. But he is so *timid*, and so easily turned about by grandees that I had rather not commune with him as my heart dictates. I have written him some letters lately in the *kind spirit* which I feel for him, and would now send this thro' him, but for reasons. He is a gentleman and a man of honor that I shall always *love*; but he lives, I fear, with Archer yet, from whom we have nothing to expect but concentrated bitterness and unrelenting opposition—and who gets from Colo. C. in despite of himself everything that *he* knows. I trust there is a change in this respect. A's opposition to the Administration will I hope break the connection. If so, well and good—I know it not, & do not run the risk.

I have not seen Mr. Ritchie for more than a month. (\*) it has been 18 days since I was in Richmond, living 4 or 5 (\*) off only—Believe nothing that my enemies say of me, and be assured of my friendly regards.

C. W. GOOCH.

I have no time to revise & correct this hasty & frank letter—and trust you will find out the omissions of idea or of language.

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(\*Words torn out.)



## AN ADDRESS TO THE DEMOCRATS OF VIRGINIA, 1840.

TO THE PEOPLE OF VIRGINIA.<sup>1</sup>

A few words, fellow-citizens, we beg leave to lay before you on the eve of this important election! The argument is nearly exhausted, and it is almost time to act. It is scarcely necessary for us, at this eleventh hour, to enter into the merits of the controversy before you. The principles of the two parties, the qualifications of the two candidates, the abominable expedients and humbugs of the Whigs have been spread before you in every variety of form. The Address of the Richmond Convention of February, and the Address of the Charlottesville Convention of September, have touched all the great issues of the subject, and superceded the necessity of any elaborate appeal from our Central Committee.

You have now to choose between Martin VanBuren and Wm. H. Harrison. Can any staunch Republican of the Virginia State Rights' School hesitate in his choice! Gen. Harrison is indebted for his nomination, not to the soundness of his political principles, but to very different considerations. He was selected on account of some military eclat, which was supposed to encircle his name; and by the very party, who had denounced the elevation of a Military Chieftain, as worse than "war, pestilence and famine." He was originally nominated in '36, by the anti-Masons, whose support he did not hesitate to seek by pledges indirectly given against the Masons. He was nominated at Harrisburg in December last, by the casting vote and the decided influence of the Abolitionists. Their motley ranks have been swelled by every man, who hated the administration of Martin VanBuren; who desires a National Bank, a Protective Tariff, a wild system of International Improvements, the distribution of the proceeds of the public lands; by the Federalists, who wishes to enlarge the powers of the General Government, by a latitudinous construction of the Constitu-

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<sup>1</sup>Address of the Democratic Central Committee to the Voters of Virginia, written by Thomas Ritchie.



tion; by ambitious men, who would gratify their political aspirations by a change of the administration; by the friends of embarrassed banks; and by men, who seek to repair their fortunes, by a new extension of a swollen credit system. On no one great Constitutional question is General Harrison to be found with the Virginia School. He is a Latitudinarian in the construction of the Constitution. He approved of the Proclamation, before it was explained by General Jackson; and adopted Mr. Webster's speech upon it, as the most "satisfactory exposition of the principles of the Government." He will veto no bill for the establishment of a National Bank—and he is the candidate of the Bank men.—The Tariff men looked to him for protection. The friends of Internal Improvements looked to him for appropriations. The Clay men turned to him for a distribution of the proceeds of the public lands. The advocates of Assumption expect countenance, if not co-operation. What is still worse, he is the candidate of the Abolitionists. His elevation will expand that dark cloud, which now threatens the South. Not only has he avowed his anxiety to appropriate every cent of your surplus revenue to the purchase and emancipation of the slaves; but his Northern Whig friends are tactitly leagued with the Abolitionists. In Congress they have voted for the right of petition. In their State councils, they have lent "aid and countenance to the enemy." The danger is growing upon us. Their number is increasing; and their operations are extending to the World's Convention in London. Do we not see more of their friends return to Congress? Can we be blind to the succor, which they are giving to General Harrison in Ohio, and New York, and all the Northern States? If elected at all, he will be indebted for his success to the Abolitionists of New York and Ohio; and his elevation will become the signal of more extended operations. Petitions will be poured upon Congress, for the emancipation of the slave in the District of Columbia. The torrent of Debate will continue to be rolled on—More and more agitation will be produced; until the North and South will become more and more excited; more and more alienated from each other—and the





Union itself will be exposed to the danger of dissolution. Such are the consequences, which threaten us from the election of Gen. Harrison. On the other hand, Mr. VanBuren has always been characterized as "the Northern man with Southern feelings." He is a friend of a strict construction of the Constitution. He is opposed to an enlargement of the powers of the General Government; and he is, therefore, necessarily opposed to an increase of the Executive power.—No man has expressed a more "decided approbation of the doctrines of Virginia" than he has—no one has expressed a stronger "conviction of the benefits," (to use his own words,) which have been derived from their influence; of the extent to which the future operations of our political institutions are dependent upon the continued respect and confidence in them, as well as (his) unfeigned admiration of the unsurpassed disinterestedness and inflexible fidelity, with which these doctrines have, through evil and through good report, been sustained by that truly patriotic member of the Confederacy." He is solemnly pledged to veto a National Bank—as well as any bill, which touches the subject of slavery, let it approach us in any form it may assume. He has declared himself in his recent letter to the Whigs of Duchess county, to be in favor of the course pursued by Congress, in putting all petitions to sleep, which relate even to the District of Columbia, or the Territories of the U. S. Under his auspices, therefore, we are safe from all debate, all agitation of the subject, in the National Councils.

Can you then, as friends of the Virginia State Rights School, hesitate in your choice between these two candidates? Can the friends of Southern Institutions be so infatuated as to prefer Harrison to VanBuren? The election of Harrison imparts new power and confidence to the fell spirits of Abolitionism—whilst it shakes our "natural allies, the Democracy of the North." How could you expect them to stand by you, when you do not stand by them; nor even by yourselves?

We appeal, therefore, to all your interests and to all your principles. You have a safe and able Chief Magistrate in Martin VanBuren. He is "honest, capable and faithful to



the Constitution." Under his auspices, the rights of the States and of the People would be best secured against the encroachments of the Federal Government. No National Bank, no Protective Tariff, no wild system of International Improvements, no distribution of the proceeds of the Public Lands, and consequently no necessity to raise higher duties or resort to loans to supply the deficiency. His influence would rebuke the efforts of Abolitionism, whilst it strengthens our legitimate friends in the Northern States. He would administer the Government by the force of his own understanding, and the lights of his own experience. But very different would be the issue, under General Harrison's auspices. His own want of qualification would subject him to the authority of superior minds. Daniel Webster and Henry Clay would become the lords of the ascendant. These ultra Federal principles would control the measures of his Administration. The powers of the Federal Government would be enlarged, and every new power would necessarily swell the volume of the Executive influence. An immediate attempt would be made to establish a Mammoth Bank of the United States—affecting the politics and markets of the whole country—and centralizing in the North the monied power of the Union. The Tariff would be expanded. But we forbear to enlarge further upon these gloomy, yet rational anticipations. The details are revolting to our feelings, and to all our principles.—The most significant forerunner of all these consequences is to be found in the late visit of D. Webster to your metropolis. Invited as he was, to preach politics from the portico of your Capitol, you may see in his advent the certain sign of the coalition between the Federalists of Massachusetts and the Whigs of Virginia. It shadows forth his position in the coming Cabinet; and all the portentous measures, which his dark genius is destined to bring upon you. All his votes in opposition to the resolutions of Mr. Calhoun in '38, distinctly point out to you, the flood of petitions and the flame of agitations with which your rights and institutions are incessantly to be assailed.

We address your understandings alone. The friends of Mr.



VanBuren have scorned all the arts and devices of the opposition. They have spurned every appeal to the senses or the passions. They have enlisted no splendid pageants or log cabins; no such phantoms as have been raised about a standing army, or the Hoo case, or the census and direct tax. The Whigs as well as their candidate have shrunk from the exposition of their creed; whilst the Republicans have boldly proclaimed their principles in the face of the nation. Judge ye between them!

We would warn you Virginians, against the extravagant vaunts of the Whigs. If you believe them, the battle has already been fought and won. But believe them not. We have just carried the Keystone State by a vote of 7,000. James Buchanan writes on the 19th, that "we have carried the State by a triumphant majority of the Popular vote." The most authentic account represents her to be perfectly safe for Mr. Van Buren on Friday next. As Mr. Buchanan says, "we cannot then be defeated unless New York should abandon her own able, pure and illustrious Democratic Son." But who can believe her capable of such gross infatuations? Will she be insensible to every motive which appeals to her pride, her principles or her patriotism?—But, in addition to these allies, we look to S. Carolina, to Tennessee, to Alabama and Mississippi, to Arkansas and Missouri, to Illinois, to New Hampshire and to Maine, (aye, to Maine, roused up and renovated and disenthralled from her temporary disaster.) Shall we ever despair of N. Carolina and Georgia, and Maryland? No—we never yield an inch of Southern ground to the very last moment. We shall never believe till the last bugle has sounded, that a single Southern slaveholding State has surrendered her Institutions to the gripe of the enemy.

Onward, then, fellow-citizens, is the watchword.—The prospect is bright before us. Let us unite with the Keystone State, and the Empire State, in order to save the principles of the Republican Party, by re-electing Mr. VanBuren. Despise the idle and habitual deceptions of the Whigs. They are insidiously attempting to paralyze your exertions, and to keep you from the polls. The expedient is only worthy of the tac-







tics which has distinguished them during this whole campaign. Despise their braggadocias as well as their threats. The election of Martin VanBuren hangs upon the vote of Virginia—Can you refuse to give him that vote?—But even if all our sister States were to desert us at this crisis, the necessity for your own exertion would be the greater; your victory would be the brighter; your future destiny would be the more glorious. What rational politician can expect any good from the Federal Dynasty? Who can expect any useful fruit from such a tree? “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” It is the Upas tree, which promises us nothing but poison. Come, then, to the rescue, fellow-citizens—and even if you were to stand alone, stand alone in vindicating your principles. To you would have to be committed the consecrated standard of '99. Virginia, which saved the country from Federal misrule in 1800—and which has since preserved our principles, would again become the flag-ship of the Republican party. Who would aspire to a higher distinction?

But as we tell you, fellow-citizens, that with the aid of your vote Mr. VanBuren may be re-elected; that as Pennsylvania is safe, N. York will probably be with her; so it becomes our duty to warn them against the deceptions which may be practiced upon them. We, therefore, tell Pennsylvania, N. York, not to fear Virginia, With your aid, we shall carry this State by a majority of several thousands. According to the estimate of the Charlottesville Convention in September last, the Republican ticket would have near 6,000 majority. Notwithstanding the ridiculous calculations of the late Whig Convention, we are satisfied that we shall triumphantly carry the State on the 2nd of November. All our accounts from the country are of the most cheering description. Every day is adding to the ranks of the Democracy. The designs of the Whigs are becoming better understood. Their expedients more detested—the hopes of the Abolitionists more alarming—Their union with the Northern Whigs more distinctly unmasked. All the reports of our Committees in the several counties are calculated to encourage us. All our letters promise us the most



auspicious results. Take one evidence only of the deceptive estimate of the Whig Convention.—They allow us only a majority of 500 in the Southwestern District. We had on Thursday last the authority of a gentleman who has just traversed the whole of that region, that “All is well in Hopkin’s District—we should receive there a majority of from 1800 to 2000, exceeding our moderate estimate at Charlottesville by 6 to 800 votes. But still more! The Convention of Delegates which met at Abingdon on the 16th inst. made an estimate for themselves, and it “gives VanBuren upwards of 1800 majority in the District.”

To the Polls, then! To the Polls! Frown down these Federal politicians, and these pestilent Fanatics. The eyes of the whole Union are now fixed upon you. Virginia may be the battle ground on which the whole campaign is to be decided. But triumph we certainly shall, if the Republicans will do their duty. Go forth, then, and let us have a fair decision by the People.—But no decision can be fair, unless the vote be a full one; and fraud be banished from the polls. Let the example of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, during the last year—let the complaints in Ohio about the spurious votes, which have been poured in upon her at the late election—let the developments which are at this moment breaking out in New York, of near \$50,000 being paid for inundating her with 1600 votes at \$30 a head, from Philadelphia, to carry her election in '38—let every consideration, which can address itself to our principles or our prudence, move us to watch every abuse of the right of suffrage.—Be not too sanguine, lest you become supine—but let every man of you go to the polls. Was there ever a time when Virginia should more anxiously call upon every Republican to do his duty, and to give one day to the republic? We call especially upon all our County Committees to be at their posts. The opposition is well organized. We must be so likewise. Distribute your tickets in due season—remember that the name of James Gibson of Hampshire has just been substituted for that of Hierome L. Opie, of the 15th District, on the Electoral Ticket: Remember the 2nd day of



November is the day of Election. Remember, too, that every man's vote in Virginia counts alike, whether he be on the shores of the Atlantic, or beyond the Mountains. The election is decided by the majority in the whole State, and not in any one county. Every vote may be important.—We have put the case fairly before you—and you must now decide. In the name of Old Virginia, of all her dearest principles; of all the Institutions of the South, and by your regard to the Union itself, we call upon every man to do his duty. Go forth, and strike a blow for your country. We have done our duty. Fellow-citizens the decision rests with you.

THOMAS RITCHIE,

Secretary to the Democratic Central Committee.

Richmond, Oct. 24, 1840.





## EDITORIAL IN THE RICHMOND ENQUIRER, FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 1842.

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Written by Thomas Ritchie.

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### MORE MISREPRESENTATIONS!

*The Creature's at his dirty work again.*—Pope.

It is in vain to tutor the "passion's slave," that rules the brazen Tripod of the Richmond Whig. Though his incessant violent attacks upon the members of the Democratic party, and ourselves among the rest, have been shown to be as empty as the air, he still returns to the "dirty work," in hopes that he may thereby help along his Idol, Henry Clay, whose motley livery he wears, and whose every word falls like inspiration upon the greedy ears of this truly independent and dignified Editor. He has recently, from sheer malice, or, perhaps, from an Iago like desire to produce a breach between our friends, (instead of manfully attacking and confuting the great doctrines of the Republican party.) invented a senseless story of our being hostile to Mr. Calhoun. He impudently asserts, that he knows how bitterly the Editor of the Enquirer hates Mr. C. and how falsely he is dealing with his friends. Those who know us, and have observed the constant misrepresentations of the Whig, which we have met and sometimes condescended to refute as soon as uttered, will scarcely think it necessary for us to repel this vile charge—but we desire to stand *rectus in curia*. We, therefore, shall, in the first place, deny the truth of his statement in every particular; and, as he "knows" the facts so positively, we call upon him to publish the evidences on which this knowledge is based—and the channels through which he obtained the evidence. He has made the charge openly and without qualification. We deny it most proudly—the issue is before the public. Let him produce his proof—or, in de-



fault, acknowledge his course to have been most unmanly and unjustifiable. We have no personal connection with the Editor of the Whig—but neither to any of his friends, nor to any of our own, have we for a long time breathed a sentiment of the slightest hostility to John C. Calhoun. We appeal to our most intimate friends, whether our feelings are not of a very different tone. But we have no objection to repeat what we have said of Mr. Calhoun at different periods—on the first act, when the curtain rose upon his political life—subsequently in '23, when he appeared before the American People as a candidate for the Presidency—still further on, when we entertained strong prejudices against Mr. Calhoun and did not do justice to his motives—and last of all, when Mr. C. revising his ancient opinions, and maturing his judgment, has come forward one of the staunchest champions of the Virginia State Rights school—and devotes his extraordinary talents to the support of what we have always believed to be the cause of Truth. This hasty epitome of our opinions will show at least, that however our sentiments may have variously changed in thirty years, our variations have been in keeping with his conformity or opposition to the great principles which have been our polar star. We have no objection to giving this epitome of our opinions of Mr. Calhoun, in order to show how far we differed with him at one time, and how our present appreciation of that great statesman is in perfect consistency with our course in the memorable periods of the War of 1812, and the canvass of 1823.

In 1811, Mr. Calhoun made his first appearance (and a brilliant one it was) on the political stage. He coped with Mr. John Randolph, with a giant's strength, and ably advocated the war. His speech contained a triumphant vindication of the policy of his country. We were strong advocates for that war, and in our enthusiasm, we published the following panegyric of Mr. C:

“His speech, like a fine drawing, abounds in those lights and shades, which set off each other—the cause of his country is robed in light, while her opponents are wrapped in



darkness. It were a contracted wish that Mr. Calhoun were a Virginian—though after the quota she has furnished, with opposition talents, such a wish might be forgiven us. Yet we beg leave to participate, as Americans and friends of our country, in the honors of South Carolina. We hail this young Carolinian as one of the master spirits, who stamp their name upon the age in which they live.”—*Enquirer*, Dec. 24, 1811

In the lapse of time, and amidst political revolutions, Mr. C. and ourselves, were separated. In 1823, we thought that he went for too liberal a construction of the Federal Constitution, in advocating a Bank, High Tariff, and Internal Improvements. Indeed, we understand, Mr. C. does not himself deny that his then opinions did not tally with the true State Rights principles. We differed with him—and, in a zealous support of the claims of Mr. Crawford, dealt some hard blows at Mr. Calhoun—but, at the same time, we never lost sight of our respect for his genius, and our gratitude for his past services. We give an extract and call particular attention to the concluding sentence, which hints at the contingency of Mr. C’s reaching the highest honors in the country:

“We grant him address, genius, enthusiasm, great capacities in almost any degree which his friends may claim for him. He is quick, fertile in expedients, seizing all the weak points of his adversary, at a glance, and turning them adroitly against him.—But these are not all the essential qualifications of a President of the U. S. Does he, among others, possess that sound judgment which is so requisite for the administration? How does he show it, when he suffers himself to be pushed on for an office, which is not ripe for him, and he not ripe for it? When he mistakes the true theory of our Constitution, and advocates the assumption of extensive powers by the Federal Government, which were never conferred? We have glanced over only a few pages of the Proceedings of Congress. These and other cases put together show, that his judgment is not ripened. Give it time to mature. Let Mr. Calhoun deliberately review and modify some of his principles, and he may yet fill the first office in the Government.”







The era of Nullification came upon us, when it was again our misfortune to differ with Mr. Calhoun—when we thought he had reasoned wrong from right premises, (Madison's Report.)—And we again dealt some hard blows at John C. Calhoun, but, in the course of time, Mr. C. became convinced that the principles of '98 and '99 were the only safe guides of an American Statesman. He "reviewed" his old principles—magnanimously took up the flag of States Rights, and, with truth and reason for his weapons, he has carried on a deadly warfare upon the Federal party. We, in conjunction with the Republican party, have watched with pride his noble bearing. We admire him as a man—we honor his genius, and respect that judgment which shed so bright a light over the most intricate subjects. We feel grateful for his first and his latter services, and would now be happy to see our prediction of '23 verified, when the proper time arrives, and to see him carry out the great principles of the Republican party. Upon none other would we support him. But whether that time shall come at the next election, or when, it is for this Republican people to decide.—On this point, we assert, with the uttermost sincerity that we have committed ourselves to no man. We prefer the success of our principles to the personal aggrandizement of any individual. We are not like the sycophant of the Whig, bound to the ear of any proud superior. We are not like the R. Whig, willing to admit that we have in our party but one man worthy to preside over the Republic—but one Patriot fit to wield the power of Sparta. We can see in the great body of the Democracy many a noble spirit, who will truly and worthily carry out our doctrines and bring permanency and prosperity to our institutions. But the selection of that man is in the hands of the Republicans—we shall support him with all our zeal, let the nomination come when it may; and it must come in due season from the great movement of the Democracy of the Union; and shall we not raise the drooping spirit of our opponents by a premature agitation of this subject, which they now sigh to see, from the forlorn hope of seeing it create dissension in our ranks. We repeat, that so



far from hating John C. Calhoun, we would have no objection to see him our champion at some future election—if he be the choice of the Republicans. If this be “hating” Mr. Calhoun, the witling of the Whig may make the most of it!

One word, by way of comparison, between Messrs. Clay and Calhoun! Mr. Clay is a Virginian. He says, that he carried with him to Kentucky the great principles of the ancient Commonwealth. He acknowledges his obligations to Robert Brooke, Esq. the former Governor of Virginia—a staunch States Rights man, from whose lips too, touched with fire, we young as we were, were wont to hear those great doctrines eloquently expounded, and we heard them with the deepest impression. Mr. Clay not only carried these doctrines with him to Kentucky—but he saw them powerfully enforced in the resolutions, drawn by the pen of Jefferson, and proclaimed by his adopted State. (We mean, of course, the Kentucky Resolutions) yet with all these advantages—with these great Principles, once expounded both by his native and his adopted States, in two of the most memorable papers which the world has ever seen; from the pens of two of the most illustrious Statesmen, whom this proud Commonwealth has ever produced—Mr. Clay has apostatized from his former faith. He does not hold one fundamental doctrine in common with Madison’s Report. All his constitutional principles, (save in his anti-Bank speech of 1810.) and most of his practical measures are at war with the creed of Virginia. But Mr. Calhoun has none of these advantages. The resolutions of Kentucky and Virginia were a sealed book to him—yet when his judgment matured—he adopted our strict principles of construction as his own—and he is now supporting the great creed, which Mr. Clay has abandoned, and with an enthusiasm and a power, which command our admiration. We are satisfied, that he has the same great object in view, as we have, to reform the Government, to restore the Constitution, and to give permanent ascendancy to the Old Republican doctrines of ’98.

We will briefly notice another scintillation of this Editor’s inventive powers. He again parades the fabulous Richmond





Junto. He is like one of the tribe of Munchausen or Mendez Da Pintos, who from the habit of retailing their misrepresentations, actually believe what they say. We pity his condition and advise him to drop the pen, and in the quiet realities of Nature, to make an effort to recover his faculties, which have become awfully distracted by his editorial practices. He thus may be enabled to separate what is true from what is false. He now charges, that "discord and contention have arisen among the Junto" with regard to the "new aspirants for the spoil and glory," which he modestly asserts "the Junto have been wont to disburse." He then utters a mass of nonsense about the conflicting opinions of the "Junto" as to Messrs. Stevenson, Calhoun and Wise, and winds up with an insidious attack upon a "distinguished Bank officer," who "is so very much in earnest in his devotion to the Ex-Governor (Gilmer) that, if the Enquirer will not publish his eulogies, we may look out for handbills!" He here makes another impudent charge—and we again challenge him for his proof. Let him give us the names of this dreadful "Junto"—their times and places of meetings. The charges of its author are too ridiculous to notice seriously. Does not this organ of the Whig see, that his own party are laughing at his absurd and fabulous stories? Thers is no such thing as a "Junto." Who are the heads of this cabal? If there be such a monster in this City, they are working in the dark, at least from us. We have had no political meeting with either of them—we have no such communication with them, direct or indirect—We are not informed of their schemes. They have given us no suggestions to guide our footsteps. We take no sort of tone from any of them. Cut off from all species of affiliation with them, and confined to our room, and our papers, and our books, we are left to our own imperfect counsels to guide our humble barque in one of the roughest seas we have ever encountered. When some of these madcap Whigs are threatening to break up the Constitution itself—when the Treasury is empty—when a violent and humbug party has seized the reins of Congress—when their movements are big perhaps with the fate of the Republic—not only





of our party, but of the whole South, we pursue our own honest course, without a Council to guide, or a Cabal to control us. These are facts, and none but a reckless fabulist like the Richmond Whig would pretend to conjure up such "Hydras and Chimaeras dire." As far as we are advised, the Democrats of Richmond have had no "discord and contention." as he charges. They respect, and, in spite of the insidious designs of the Whigs, will continue to respect the high bearing of the distinguished gentleman whom he sneers at. The whole story is as false as it is unmanly and unwarrantable. The "distinguished bank officer," whom the Whig is in the habit of carping at, knows what value to put upon the stupid and malignant attacks of the Whigs—and is satisfied that nothing that the Whig can say will affect him in the opinion of even the Whigs of Richmond. They have too much justice and propriety to be influenced by the impotent ravings of such an Editor. His course is indeed well calculated to benefit the Republicans of Virginia. His attempts to sow discord in our ranks will tend to connect our party. His efforts to stain the bright banner of our distinguished men will serve to confirm them in the good opinion of the country.

P. S. One word only as to the fanfaronade which appears in the last Wednesday's Whig. We pass over the unmanly and illiberal hit which he levels at a "Tory's kinsman." We have touched that theme too often to require any further notice at this time. The grave itself cannot protect the ashes of a noble spirit from the attacks of the hyaena. Had we in our veins "all the blood of all the Howards," besides the blood of as ardent Patriots as Virginia can boast of, we could not be safe from the malignant insinuations of an indecent and factious slang-whanger. But the whole article of the Richmond Whig about the "discretionary power," is a sheer and a shallow misrepresentation. It is in the face of facts directly before his eyes. Had he have done us the justice to use our own words, and let us speak for ourselves, his feeble ingenuity would have been stript of its miserable device. The world would have seen that he was nothing but a shallow calumniator. We never have



called for an issue of twenty millions of Treasury notes, as he pretends. We never have called upon Congress to grant the Executive "the discretionary power to impose a debt upon the people of twenty millions, or ten millions, or five millions." We never have "proposed to vest in him authority to contract a national debt at his discretion. Stare not, gentle reader—Start not at these gross misrepresentations of this oracle of the Clay Clique of this place. We are sorry to say, that it is perfectly in keeping with the character of the Richmond Whig. It is Congress which has already authorized the President to make a loan, and create a debt to the amount of, not twenty millions, but of twelve millions. The Secretary of the Treasury has tried to borrow a part of it at home. He has only succeeded in getting a little more than a million. He has sent an agent to Europe to make the negotiation. When he will succeed, or whether at all, or whether on any but the most usurious terms, it passes the wits of any man to tell. The London Morning Chronicle tells us, by the last steamer, that we cannot accomplish a loan abroad. (Since penning this passage, we have seen the Veto Message, which says; "No immediate relief from this state of things is anticipated, unless, what would most deeply be deplored, the Government could be reconciled to the negotiation of loans already authorized by law, at a rate of discount ruinous in itself, and calculated most seriously to affect the public credit.") What then would be our situation? The Treasury penniless before the next session of Congress—these devoted Clay partizans giving away even the land fund, with a frantic devotion to their miserable party—how could the Government escape discredit, perhaps disgrace? In this state of things, we have proposed not to make a new debt—not to give the Executive the discretionary power to contract a national debt—not to add one dollar, much less twenty millions to the debt which Congress themselves have already authorized, but to change the form of the transaction—and if he cannot obtain the money by a funded debt abroad, to authorize him to issue Treasury notes to the necessary amount, specifying it in the law, as also the fact that it is to take the place of so much



# THE JOHN P. BRANCH HISTORICAL PAPERS

OF

## RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

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### CONTENTS

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PREFACE	- - - - -	281
GEORGE WYTHE—L. S. HERRINK	- - - - -	283
JOHN LETCHER—E. B. PRETTYMAN	- - - - -	314
LETTER DESCRIBING CONDITIONS IN RICHMOND IN APRIL, 1861	- - - - -	350
THREE LETTERS FROM THOMAS RITCHIE TO HOWELL COBB	- - - - -	354

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JUNE, 1912.

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Preface.

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THE Branch Historical Papers for 1913 will contain biographies of John Floyd, P. P. Barbour, Edmund Pendleton, and Bishop Early. I have yet on hand a few complete sets of The Branch Papers which will be furnished to those who desire them at the rate of fifty cents per number.

CHARLES H. AMBLER.



## GEORGE WYTHE\*

BY L. S. HERRINK, A. B.

The Virginian of a century and a quarter ago was inclined, even more than his descendant of the present day, to pride himself on his family history. Judged by this standard, George Wythe would suffer no disparagement, for at the time of his birth in 1726, the Wythe family was one of the most prominent in Elizabeth City county.<sup>1</sup> His father, Thomas Wythe, was third in descent from the original Thomas Wythe, who had emigrated from England to Elizabeth City county about the middle of the seventeenth century. Each succeeding generation had been prominent in local affairs.<sup>2</sup> George's father was a member of the House of Burgesses and for many years represented his county in that capacity. He owned a plantation on Back River and seems to have been a man of considerable means. Of his private life very little is known, but he was famed for his amiable character, his simplicity and candor of behavior, his parental tenderness, and his prudence in the management of his fortune.<sup>3</sup> His mother was one of the five daughters of George Keith, a Scotch Quaker, distinguished as a mathematician and Oriental scholar, who immigrated to Hampton, Virginia, about 1684. Keith held radical views in regard to religion and slavery. He was the author of "Exhortation and Caution Against Buying or Keeping Negroes," seemingly the earliest Quaker protest against slavery, and of a treatise on mathematical subjects.<sup>4</sup>

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\*Awarded the Bennett History Medal for 1911.

<sup>1</sup>Jefferson, *Papers I.*, 14., 205.

<sup>2</sup>*William and Mary Quarterly. Historical Papers*, II., 69.

<sup>3</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of the Signers*, IV., 172-173.

<sup>4</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 86.



Of Wythe's early life very little is known. He spent most of his youth at home, and received nothing like a thorough education.<sup>5</sup> While at school he learned only to read and write the English language, and to apply the simple rules of arithmetic.<sup>6</sup> The year spent at William and Mary College may have supplied some of the defects of his early training, but there is no record left concerning his career at that institution.<sup>7</sup>

Like Washington and many other distinguished men, George was still very young when his father died, leaving his entire estate to his eldest son. Wythe was then withdrawn from school, and for several years the entire direction of his education fell on his mother, a woman of unusual knowledge and strength of mind. She was intimately acquainted with and spoke the Latin language fluently, and it was from her that her young son received instruction in the rudiments of both Latin and Greek.<sup>8</sup>

After he had acquired a fairly good education in this way, Wythe devoted himself to the study of law under his uncle-in-law, Mr. Drewry, who was a distinguished lawyer of Prince George county. Very little attention was paid to his legal education, and his time was chiefly taken up with the drudgery of a lawyer's office. It is therefore not surprising that he made very little progress, but the experience gained in this office work probably laid the foundations for much of his future success.

After two years spent in this cursory study of the law, Wythe returned home and devoted himself assiduously to his studies.<sup>9</sup> The defects of his early education were very largely supplied by his great energy and perseverance. Alone and unaided he soon acquired a well organized and extensive store of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> He became well versed in grammar, rhetoric, and logic and acquired a considerable knowledge of civil law. He

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<sup>5</sup>Jefferson, *Papers I.*, 14, 205.

<sup>6</sup>*American Law Journal*, III., 92.

<sup>7</sup>H. G. Grigsby, *Virginia Convention 1776*, 119.

<sup>8</sup>*American Law Journal*, III., 92.

<sup>9</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 86.

<sup>10</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV., 172.





was also a profound student of mathematics, natural and moral philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

When his mother and elder brother died in 1746, Wythe inherited the entire family fortunes. The sudden inheritance of so large a fortune, and the removal of all parental restraint caused a complete change in the course of his life. From this time on through a period covering the ten best years of his life, he was dissipated. He did not, however, entirely abandon his studies, but in the intervals between his dissipations he found time to cultivate his talents.<sup>12</sup> During this period, he moved in the fashionable society of eastern Virginia, which was undoubtedly the best in America. Williamsburg was the capital of the Old Dominion, and the social center of the entire Tidewater section of the State. While the House of Burgesses was in session, it was the great rendezvous for the aristocratic plantation owners, and the leading men from all over the State. Wythe associated freely with these distinguished men, and his later life was no doubt influenced by the ambitions and aspirations that he caught from them.<sup>13</sup>

Only a meager record has been left concerning this period of Wythe's life, but the facts obtainable indicate that he was not engaged in any regular occupation. For some time he served as clerk to both the Committee of Privileges and Elections, and the Committee of Propositions and Grievances in the House of Burgesses, and in 1754 he was appointed to fill out the unexpired term of Armistead Burwell, created by the latter's death.<sup>14</sup> Wythe was thus acquiring that knowledge of parliamentary proceedings, for which he was soon to become celebrated.<sup>15</sup>

He possessed a strong will power, and after ten years of dissipation he threw aside his old vices, and changed the whole course of his life. Whether love, the foreseen exhaustion of his

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<sup>11</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 10, 1806.

<sup>12</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 86.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Journals of The House of Burgesses*, October 28, 1748, February 28, 1752, May 2, 1755.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, August 22, 1754.



resources, his own penitent reflections, the influence of interested friends, or several causes combined brought this change is not definitely known.<sup>16</sup> He turned again to his studies, and by his unceasing toil soon become the best educated man in the State. He was above all known for his broad and comprehensive knowledge of the classics.<sup>17</sup>

In those days a Virginian could attain popularity and distinction in only two ways: through the law profession, or through politics. In fact, the two were almost synonymous, for as soon as a man became distinguished as a lawyer he usually entered politics. Wythe's ambition along both lines led him to resume his study of the law under Mr. Lewis, an eminent practitioner. After some time spent in Lewis' office he was admitted to the bar of the General Court, then occupied by men of great ability in their profession. That same perseverance and energy that had made Wythe the best scholar in Virginia was now displayed in his study and practice of the law. He made of himself a profound lawyer, and became perfectly versed in the civil and common law, and in the statutes of Great Britain and Virginia. Among such distinguished lawyers as Pendleton, Blair, Bland, and Edmund Randolph, Wythe soon attained an eminent position, and in a few years became the leading man at the bar on account of his superior learning, his correctness and earnestness of elocution, and his clear and logical style of argument. He not only possessed the ability necessary to make a successful lawyer, but his upright character, his high sense of honor, and his fidelity to his clients won for him the universal respect and esteem of his countrymen.<sup>18</sup> It has been said that he never supported an unjust cause, and was so particular in this respect, that, where there was any doubt as to the truth of his client's statements, the client must swear to their truth before Wythe would take the case. If deception was practiced upon him in any way, he would abandon the case and return the fee.<sup>19</sup>

In colonial times every Virginian who aspired to attain any

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<sup>16</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 86.

<sup>17</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14., 205.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV, 174.



distinction among his countrymen looked forward to a seat in the House of Burgesses. In the political world this was the highest position attainable, and Jefferson, Henry, Mason, and other great Virginians of the colonial period served terms in this Assembly. In 1758 Wythe was sent to the House from William and Mary College. He there found himself among such illustrious colleagues as Pendleton, Blair, Bland, Nicholas, Peyton Randolph, and Richard Henry Lee.<sup>20</sup>

To understand properly the history of this period we must constantly keep in mind the two geographical divisions of Virginia, the inhabitants, manners of living, and ideas of government in each. The political parties of the time were based on the differences in the geography of the various parts of the State, and a line separating the old Tidewater counties from the new counties of the Piedmont and the Valley would also separate the two political factions one from the other. The eastern counties had been settled largely by an admixture of the aristocratic cavaliers and merchant classes. Among these were to be found many younger sons of noble English families. The introduction of negro slavery and the increased demand for tobacco caused the plantation system to spread through the entire Tidewater section. On these immense plantations, the conservative aristocrats dwelt, surrounded by their retinues of servants, spending their time in pleasure, and interesting themselves in the political questions of the day. They prided themselves on being loyal to the recognized authority of the crown and to the established church.<sup>21</sup>

There was a vast difference between these people and the democratic elements of the Piedmont and the country to the westward. These were largely frontier communities. They were peopled by a poorer and more democratic element of Englishmen, with an admixture of German and Scotch-Irish. Their ancestors, and they themselves, were called upon to subdue the forest and its savage inhabitants. These people were Presbyterians in religion, and were loyal to the conceded authority of the king; but they were more ready to resist any

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<sup>20</sup>*Journals of The House of Burgesses*, 1758, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup>*Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches of Patrick Henry, I., 73-74.*







encroachments on their rights, and to withstand the exercise of arbitrary powers on the part of the crown than were the Tidewater aristocrats.

Of the 56 counties on the roll of the House of Burgesses, 36 were located in the old Tidewater section, while the remaining 20 counties comprised the vast western country. Since every county had an equal representation, the government of the State was controlled by a section comprising only a small fraction of the State's area, and much less than half of its population. Throughout the period that Wythe served in the House, there was a constant struggle existing between the two sections. The conservative majority fought to maintain their control of the reins of government, while in opposition to them, the pioneers from the west were striving to acquire the power they believed to be justly due them.<sup>22</sup>

In 1764, there occurred a discussion in the House of Burgesses which clearly showed the hostile attitude of the two geographical sections of the State. At this time, many of the plantation owners were deeply involved in debt, among whom was Mr. Robinson, Treasurer of the Commonwealth, and speaker of the House of Burgesses. He therefore devised with his friends a bill establishing a public loan office for the benefit of private debtors. The bill provided that from this office, funds might be loaned at public account, and on good land security. The real object of the bill was merely to permit Robinson and his friends to saddle off their debts on the State. Patrick Henry, although a resident of the lowlands, led the westerners in a bitter attack on the measure, which was defeated largely through his efforts. In this matter Wythe was lined up with the conservative leaders, but there is nothing to show that he was acquainted with the real object of the bill.<sup>23</sup>

In both debate and in the committee room, Wythe soon became one of the leading members of the House. He was never distinguished as an orator, but he was well known for his skill and effectiveness in debate. His strength in debate lay in the

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<sup>22</sup>Henry, *Life, Correspondence and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, I., 74-75.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, I., 76.



opening arguments of a case, in which for thorough preparation, clearness, and force no one could excel him. His great rival, Pendleton, was more ready in opening and closing a discussion and, through his keenness of apprehension, he was more prompt to meet all the exigencies of an argument.<sup>24</sup> Pendleton had only a superficial knowledge of law, and in general education he was far inferior to Wythe. However, his pleasing manner, his ability and eloquence as an orator, and his quickness of perception made him a much more popular speaker than his great contemporary.<sup>25</sup> Pendleton never attained any distinction as a committeeman; whereas Wythe was even more prominent in this capacity than in debate during the entire eleven years of his service in the House of Burgesses. For this service, his profound legal knowledge, sound common sense, and impartiality of judgment, specially fitted him. With these qualifications it is not surprising that after only a few years of service, he should be found serving on more committees than any other man with the exception of two or three of the older members.<sup>26</sup>

During the early sixties one of the gravest questions of the eighteenth century began gradually to loom up before the American colonies. The charters granted to the various colonies had guaranteed to them the enjoyment of the privileges and rights of Englishmen. For many years England respected these charters, and left to the colonists the management of their own affairs. After the French and Indian War England was heavily burdened with debt, and it seemed only just to the ministry that the colonies should bear a proportionate share of the debt incurred during a war undertaken in their behalf. Consequently, England began to tax them, and what was still more obnoxious to enforce the Navigation Laws. George III. came to the throne in 1760 with the purpose in view of making himself absolute. The tax on sugar and molasses was renewed, and steps were taken rigorously to enforce the Navigation Act.

On March 9, 1764, Prime Minister Greenville read before the House of Commons resolutions declaring that the Stamp Act

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<sup>24</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 95.

<sup>25</sup>Grigsby, *Virginia Convention of 1776*, 121.

<sup>26</sup>*Journals of The House of Burgesses, 1758-1769.*



would be imposed unless the colonists proposed some other method of taxation. These declaratory resolutions created the greatest alarm throughout America. Everywhere the proposition of the prime minister was agitated, and bitterly denounced in public discussion and by the press. The first public meeting in which opposition to the proposed tax was indicated, was held in Boston, May 24, 1764. This meeting directed their representatives to oppose the proposed tax as subversive of their rights, and directed that an effort be made to enlist the other colonists in an opposition to it. Almost all the colonists, through their legislative bodies, issued able and earnest papers in protestation against the proposed tax.<sup>27</sup>

Virginia was finally aroused to such a state of excitement that a committee was appointed in the House of Burgesses to prepare and report a petition to the king, a memorial to the House of Lords, and a remonstrance to the House of Commons on the subject of the proposed Stamp Act. The first two papers were drawn up by Richard Henry Lee, while Wythe, as a member of the committee, was appointed draftsman of the remonstrance to the House of Commons. The report, as submitted by him on December 18th, went so far beyond the timid hesitations of his colleagues, who viewed it as bordering on treason, that it underwent modifications tending to soften the harshness of the complaint before it was finally accepted by the House.<sup>28</sup>

In reading this remonstrance at the present time, we can hardly understand why it was so bitterly resisted by some members of the House. From the general tone of this paper, and of the other petitions as well, it is evident that no opposition beyond remonstrance was intended. The colonists believed in a dutiful way that the majority of their petitions would be granted. The exclusive right of the colonies to tax themselves is set forth, but the language is supplicatory, and the petitions set forth the miseries of poverty about to be inflicted on them by the proposed system of taxation. Nevertheless, Parliament persisted in its determination to tax the colonies, and this de-

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<sup>27</sup>Henry, *Life, Correspondence, and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, I., 60-61.

<sup>28</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14., 205.





termination was only increased by the Virginia Resolutions. In pursuance of this policy the Stamp Act was passed by both Houses of Parliament in February, 1765, and was to be in operation from the following November.<sup>29</sup>

America was now aroused to a spirit of resistance. The great majority of the colonists were thoroughly convinced that their liberties and rights were being violated and that the action of England was unjustifiable. With America in this frame of mind, Wythe was brought more and more into prominence on account of his radical views. He was still loyal to the mother country, and had no desire to separate the colonies from her. Although firm and determined in upholding their rights, yet he believed that a conciliatory policy should be pursued toward Great Britain. Patrick Henry's views coincided with those of Wythe, but he was more impatient and showed less diplomacy in his plans for putting them into operation.<sup>30</sup> During the month of May, 1765, Henry introduced his famous resolutions declaring that the colonists were entitled to all the privileges, liberties, and immunities of Englishmen, and that the General Assembly had the exclusive right to tax them.<sup>31</sup> These resolutions were opposed by Edmund Randolph, Bland, Pendleton, Wythe, and all the old leaders of the House. These men favored the principles as set forth by Henry, but they contended that the same sentiments had been expressed in a resolution of the previous session, and an answer to them had not yet been received.<sup>32</sup> The eloquence of Henry was sufficient to win over the members from the western counties, and he finally secured the passage of his resolutions.<sup>33</sup> The British ministry very soon saw the futility of trying to impose the Stamp Act upon the colonies. Accordingly, in 1766, the measure was repealed. Parliament did not relinquish its right to levy taxes on the colonies, for before repealing the Stamp Act a declaratory act

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<sup>29</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV., 175.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Henry, *Life, Correspondence, and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, I., 80.

<sup>32</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14., 205.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*; *Journals of The House of Burgesses, 1761-1765.*, p. LXV.



was brought in which asserted the supreme power of Parliament over the colonies "in all cases whatsoever." The cause of the friction between England and the colonies was partially removed, and the discontent in America became considerably less. This condition only existed for a short time, for the ministry soon passed the Glass, Tea, and Paper Acts, and the statute restricting the powers of the New York Legislature, which were even more irritating than the Stamp Act.

In Virginia matters were reaching a critical stage. During the notable session of 1768, Jefferson, who was a member of the House of Burgesses for the first time, introduced his famous set of resolutions which set forth in determined language the exclusive right of the colonies to tax themselves in all cases whatsoever. They contained a protest against the Glass, Stamp, Tea, and other acts of Parliament, and denounced them as a violation of the chartered rights of Englishmen. They strongly protested against the removal of cases to England for trial for offenses committed in the colonies. Governor Dunmore was known to be bitterly hostile to any such action, and for this reason it was necessary to hurry the resolutions through the House of Burgesses in a very unparliamentary manner. Dunmore dissolved the House the following day, but the people showed their approval of the action of the Burgesses by returning every member at the next election.<sup>34</sup>

While Jefferson's Resolutions were being discussed, Wythe exerted all of his power and influence to secure their adoption. Indeed, Jefferson, as a young man, was so much under the influence of Wythe, that the principles set forth in the resolutions were probably instilled into him by his former teacher. At the very beginning of the controversy with England, Wythe took the position that the only link of political union between Great Britain and the colonies was the identity of their executive and that they stood in the same relation to the mother country as Hanover. He believed that Virginia had just as much authority over England as Parliament, or the crown had over

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<sup>34</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV., 178.



the colonies.<sup>35</sup> In these views Wythe was far ahead of his time. Even as late as 1775, when Jefferson formulated his famous "Albemarle Resolutions," setting forth the same principles, he asserted that Wythe was the only man he could find to agree with him in the matter.<sup>36</sup>

Wythe was not returned to the House of Burgesses in 1769, but was appointed clerk, in which capacity he served until 1775. In the meantime our relations with Great Britain became more and more strained. From the time of the Boston Tea Party of 1773 on to the outbreak of hostilities, there gradually spread through the colonies the feeling that an appeal to arms was the only means of settling our dispute with England.

In 1775, the various counties of Virginia were asked to send up to the legislative body sets of resolutions expressing their sentiments as to the best course to be pursued towards Great Britain. In response to this appeal Jefferson and Wythe submitted the Albemarle Resolutions, which asserted that Parliament had no authority over the colonies in any case, or on any subject; that they possessed the power of self-government by natural right, or by the common rights of mankind. All the other public men of the time stopped at the half way ground with John Dickerson, who admitted that England had a right to regulate our commerce and to levy duties for that purpose, but not for revenue.<sup>37</sup>

England's determination to pursue her policy remained unshaken in spite of the petitions, remonstrances, and supplications poured in on the crown and Parliament. A large British army was landed at Boston, and on April 19, 1775, a detachment of this army was defeated by the colonial troops at Lexington. With the news of Lexington, the whole country immediately flew to arms. The colonial governors were driven out, and companies of soldiers were hastily organized, equipped, and sent forward to the scene of action. For months previous to the outbreak of hostilities, Wythe had been traveling throughout the State of Virginia, and stirring up the people to a spirit of

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<sup>35</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 4, 205.

<sup>36</sup>Rowland, *Life of George Mason*, I., 174.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*





resistance. He now donned a uniform and presented himself before the soldiery drawn up for military parade.<sup>38</sup> It was only after his friends had persuaded him that he could serve his country more efficiently in her legislative halls, that he finally consented to remain at home. His destiny was to attain distinction as a statesman, legislator, and judge rather than as a warrior.<sup>39</sup>

The Virginia convention assembled at Richmond, August 11, 1775, and elected Peyton Randolph, Richard Henry Lee, Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Nelson, Bland, and Wythe as delegates to the Continental Congress for the ensuing year.<sup>40</sup> During his year of service in this body, Wythe was one of the most prominent members. His comprehensive knowledge of governmental affairs and his long experience in the Virginia House of Burgesses, at once gave him a high position among his colleagues. He is generally considered, with the possible exception of John Adams, to have been the best educated man in Congress. On account of these qualities, he assumed the same leadership as a committeeman that he had held in the House of Burgesses. Throughout the entire year, he served on three standing committees: Clothing, Indian Affairs, and the Treasury Committee on Board.<sup>41</sup> In the number of minor committees served on, Wythe was considerably ahead of any of his colleagues. Whenever there was a report to be drawn up by a committee, he was generally chosen to do the work. This is shown by the Journals of 1776, which indicate that the number of reports written by Wythe is more than double that of any other member of congress.

He did not confine the field of his activities to the committee room, but took a leading part in the debates of Congress. From the very outset, he advocated a strong confederation. He was firmly convinced that effectual resistance to the power of England could never be made by the colonies working independent of each other, and that the safety, well-being, and independence of America depended on their uniting to form a strong confedera-

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<sup>38</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 10, 1806.

<sup>39</sup>*American Law Journal*, III., 94-95.

<sup>40</sup>*Journals of Congress*, September 13, 1775.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*, VI., 1064.



tion. He believed that the established Federal government should have complete control over import duties and the revenue derived therefrom.<sup>42</sup> While on the floor of Congress, Wythe gave utterance to principles that were in time to become the foundation of many American policies. He declared that America should have a strong navy, because no nation near the seacoast had ever been safe without one; that America should declare herself a free nation; that we should endeavor to win the favor of France and make commercial treaties with her; and that no restrictions whatsoever should be placed on American trade.<sup>43</sup> These are the principles that animated Wythe throughout his term in Congress. He continually urged the formation of a confederation among the colonies, both in the committee room and on the floor of Congress. He was also one of the staunchest supporters of the measures for independence.

On February 16, 1776, he proposed: "That there be a committee to prepare a draft of firm confederation to be reported as soon as may be to this Congress to be considered, and digested, and recommended to the several assemblies and conventions of these united colonies; to be by them adopted, ratified, and confirmed."

Wythe stood distinctly for a union in which the well-being of the entire country would be placed above that of the individual colonies. As long as there was the possibility of a settlement with Great Britain, Wythe was ready to grasp it; but when all overtures of peace on the part of the colonies had been rejected, and the only terms offered were obedience to unconstitutional authority, he took the position that a declaration of our independence was absolutely essential to the further successful conduct of the war. Accordingly, when that great document was finally drawn up and presented to Congress for acceptance, Wythe gladly added his name to it. Throughout the remainder of the year, he was constantly urging the vigorous prosecution of the war. He was the author of an address to the Hessian soldiery urging them to transfer their allegiance from

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<sup>42</sup>*Journals of Congress*, October 12, 1775.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid*, October 21, 1775.



Great Britain to the Continental Congress, and to make their homes in America.<sup>44</sup>

While the Continental Congress was thus making preparations for resisting the armies of Great Britain, the Virginia convention was in session at Richmond, reorganizing the State government, and drafting a constitution for the commonwealth. This constitution, which is largely the work of Wythe, George Mason, and Richard Henry Lee, is a memorable one, because "It is the first written constitution of a free State in the annals of the world."<sup>45</sup> The Virginia convention re-elected Wythe to congress for the ensuing year, but his loyalty to his native State induced him to resign from Congress in the early part of 1777, to serve in the House of Delegates, and to carry out the important work assigned to him there.<sup>46</sup>

The State convention, without being re-elected, had met on October 7, 1776, and constituted itself the House of Delegates. In order to bring the laws of Virginia into accord with the ideas of the revolution and the democratic principles embodied in the State constitution, the House of Delegates, on November 5, appointed Jefferson, Pendleton, Wythe, Mason and Thomas Ludwell Lee to revise the entire jurisprudence of the State of both colonial and British origin.<sup>47</sup> Upon the death of Lee, which occurred a short time afterwards, and the resignation of Mason, the entire work fell to the other three members. The part especially undertaken by Wythe was the revision of all British statutes beginning with the fourth year of the reign of James I., and ending with the establishment of an independent State government in 1776, except those for religious freedom, for regulating descents, and for apportioning crimes and punishments. This part of the work and the revision of all British statutes prior to the fourth year of the reign of James I. fell to the lot of Jefferson. Pendleton undertook the revision of the Virginia laws. Each member, however, had a general oversight of the work of the others, and was expected to correct it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*Journals of Congress*, February 16, 1776.

<sup>45</sup>Brenaman, *History of Virginia Conventions*, 33-37.

<sup>46</sup>*Journals of Congress*, January 30, 1777.

<sup>47</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, II., 18, 81.

<sup>48</sup>B.B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 88.







After three years of unremitting toil, the committee presented its report to the consideration of the House of Delegates. The farsightedness and ability of the members of this committee is clearly indicated by their report, for nearly all of its principles have been embodied in the present Code of Virginia.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the most important of the proposed amendments was the Educational Bill. This measure provided that the commonwealth should endow a system of primary schools, colleges, academies, and universities. It provided further that any young man whose parents were unable to afford him an education would be carried through the entire system, from the primary schools to the university, at the expense of the State. In this matter the members of the committee were so far ahead of their time that the principles of their report were not adopted until nearly a half century later.<sup>50</sup>

The report also provided for altering the laws of descent, so that the land of any person dying intestate should be equally divided among his children, or other representatives. It proposed that the citizens of the State should be taxed according to the value of their property for the general expenses of the State, county, and parish; for the maintenance of the poor, building bridges, court houses, and roads; and for the indemnification of individuals through whose lands new roads were opened. The committee also produced acts providing for the establishment of religious liberty, for the punishment of disturbers of public worship and Sabbath breakers, for the erection of a public library, and for setting forth the rules whereby an alien might become a citizen.<sup>51</sup>

The act for regulating conveyances, by which all estates entail were to be converted into fee simple holdings, was one of the most salutary measures adopted. By this bill the obnoxious contrivance of aristocracy to keep up inequality and support fraud and overbearing distinctions of particular families was completely wiped out. The committee further proposed that the slaves of a deceased person be made distributable among the

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<sup>49</sup>*American Law Journal*, III., 95.

<sup>50</sup>*Madison's Works*, III., 278.

<sup>51</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 13, 1806.



next of kin as other movables, that slaves committing crimes punishable in others by labor should be transported to Africa, that no attainder should cause a corruption of blood or forfeiture of dower, and that provision be made for proportioning crimes and punishments in cases heretofore regarded as capital. The last proposal furnished the foundations for our present penitentiary system.<sup>52</sup> Many of the most valuable parts of this report were not adopted until years afterwards, because of the inability of the House to fully appreciate the needs of the time.<sup>53</sup>

While Wythe was busily engaged in the work of revising the code of Virginia, he was elected a member of the House of Delegates. He served in this body for several years, and was speaker during the session of 1777.<sup>54</sup> At this time the country stretching from Detroit to the Ohio River was controlled by a chain of British forts, which were very poorly garrisoned. George Rogers Clark, who represented the county of Kentucky in the Virginia Legislature, conceived the plan of taking the entire country for the State of Virginia. To perfect his plans and make preparations for leading an expedition into the northwest country, he set out for Williamsburg in the autumn of 1777. Jefferson, Wythe, and Mason became very much interested in the proposed expedition, and succeeded in pushing through the House of Delegates a bill authorizing the governor to call out the militia against the western enemies.<sup>55</sup> They also secured the passage of a bill setting aside a bounty of three hundred acres of land for each man engaged in the enterprise. Clark's expedition was entirely successful, and the whole northwestern country fell into the possession of Virginia.<sup>56</sup>

Any sketch of Wythe, however brief, would be incomplete unless mention were made of his distinguished work in private life, and of his exemplary character. While he was rendering his state and country such illustrious service in the Virginia Legislature and in the halls of Congress, he was rendering in an unassuming way an equally great service as a professor in

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<sup>52</sup>Jefferson, *Writings*, II., 203, (Ford Ed).

<sup>53</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV., 180-181.

<sup>54</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14., 105.

<sup>55</sup>Henry, *Life, Correspondence and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, I., 581.

<sup>56</sup>Rowland, *Life of George Mason*, I., 290.



William and Mary College. When a young man in his early thirties, he had been elected to the chair of mathematics, and had for some time occupied the chair of philosophy. He soon introduced the most approved methods of pedagogy into both departments, and he became one of the most celebrated teachers in the State. While serving in this position, he instructed many of the greatest men Virginia has ever produced, among whom might be mentioned the names of Jefferson, Monroe, and John Marshall.<sup>57</sup> William and Mary was at that time the greatest college south of Mason and Dixon's Line. It was the great training ground for lawyers and politicians, and Virginians who expected to attain any distinction in their native State were usually educated there. The only other college attended by a considerable number of southerners was Princeton College, New Jersey, but its importance to the South could not compare with that of William and Mary.

Wythe's ability as a teacher was attested by Jefferson when he uttered these words, "To his enlightened and affectionate guidance of my studies at college I am indebted for everything."<sup>58</sup> So highly was his work as a teacher esteemed by Jefferson, that through his efforts a chair of municipal law was established at William and Mary in 1779, expressly for the occupancy of Wythe. William and Mary was thus the first college in America, and the second in the world to have such a chair, the first having been created only a few years previously for the occupancy of Sir William Blackstone. Wythe continued to fulfill his duties, as professor for many years, but at the same time he served his State in the various official positions to which he was elected.<sup>59</sup>

Prior to the Revolution, Wythe had been intimate with all the colonial governors with the exception of Dunmore, for whom he always entertained the heartiest contempt. He and Governor Fauquier were inseparable friends. After the governor's family had returned to England, they became warmer friends than ever, and frequently dined together. In speaking of these

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<sup>57</sup>Grigsby, *Virginia Convention 1776*, 75.

<sup>58</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14.

<sup>59</sup>*Encyclopedia Americana*.







functions Jefferson, who was usually present with them, afterwards said, "At these dinners I have heard more good sense, more rational and philosophical conversation than in all my life besides."<sup>60</sup>

The Virginia High Court of Chancery was established in 1777. It consisted of three judges chosen by a joint ballot of both houses of the General Assembly, commissioned by the governor, and holding office during good behavior. The court had general jurisdiction in all cases in chancery, both original and appellate, but no original suit could be instituted therein for a less sum than fifty dollars, except against a justice of a county or other inferior court, or the vestry of a parish. The court held two terms a year in the city of Williamsburg. The judges were ex-officio judges of the court of appeals, where they were entitled to precedence. In 1788, the number of judges was reduced to one and the terms of court were increased to four a year, now held at Richmond, to which city the place of sitting had been removed in 1780. The jurisdiction of the High Court of Chancery extended over the entire State until 1801, when the State was divided into three districts, with a superior court of chancery and a separate chancellor in each. These courts were held at Richmond, Staunton, and Williamsburg, and such remained the system until after Wythe's death. For many years there was great variation in the salaries paid, but they were finally fixed at 300 pounds annually.<sup>61</sup>

When the High Court of Chancery was first organized, Wythe was elected one of the three judges, which position he continued to hold until the reorganization of the court in 1788. He then became sole Chancellor of the state, and filled this office with great ability throughout the remainder of his life. His uprightness, independence, and impartiality, combined with his attention to business and his industry specially fitted him for a judgeship. John Randolph, of Roanoke, was accustomed to say of him, "That he lived in the world without being of the world, and that he was a mere incarnation of justice." Mr. Wythe himself declared that even compassion ought not to influence a judge,

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<sup>60</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 2, 14.

<sup>61</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 88.



in whom, acting officially, apathy was less a vice than sympathy.<sup>62</sup> His career as a judge indicates more clearly than any other one thing the patriotism and absolute disinterestedness of the man. For years he filled one of the most laborious and at the same time least lucrative offices in the country, merely because he felt that in this capacity he could render more efficient service to his State and country than in any other. While if he had so desired, he could have secured much easier and more profitable employment elsewhere.<sup>63</sup>

The absolute disregard for the pressure of public opinion and the impartiality of Wythe are perhaps best indicated in two of his famous decisions. In the first of these decisions, Wythe handed down the opinion that according to the statute of 1779, officers and soldiers who had not served through the Revolution were not entitled to half pay on retirement.<sup>64</sup> Such a decision as this naturally raised a storm of indignation, not only from the large number of Revolutionary soldiers affected, but also from the general public as well. Wythe's most important decision and the one requiring the greatest courage to render, was the one in regard to the British debt cases. After the peace of 1783 there were many persons in Virginia who owed debts in England. Soon after the treaty of peace the General Assembly had enacted a law whereby payments of paper money into the loan office of the State in satisfaction of debts due to British creditors should discharge the debtors. Edmund Pendleton and Peter Lyons, as administrators for John Robinson, sought for their intestate's estate the protection of a payment made under these laws. Pendleton and Lyons had secured a favorable decision in a lower court, and public opinion was overwhelmingly in their favor. Wythe, however, ruled that a debt due a British creditor was not discharged by such a payment into the loan office under the act of 1788. In upholding his decision that the statute of 1788 was null and void, Wythe stated that the General Assembly of Virginia was not empowered to release a debtor

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<sup>62</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery* 91.

<sup>63</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 13, 1806.

<sup>64</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 248.



from a payment due a creditor; and besides, the jurisdiction assumed by the General Assembly over British subjects could not possibly exist. He further added that if the Assembly should pass an act confiscating British property in America, it could not include money in the hands of Americans due English creditors, for the money could not be English property until it had actually been paid over to subjects of Great Britain.<sup>65</sup>

Wythe clearly indicated in this decision his profound respect for the rights of foreign nations. A new era had dawned in judicial history. The plaintiff was a foreign nation, the defendant a sovereign State, the judge a creation of the State, and popular opinion strangely set in favor of the defendant; and yet the court decided in favor of the plaintiff. Quite a contrast to the decisions of the British prize courts in the West Indies! Concerning this matter Wythe expressed his exact ideas when he uttered these words, "A judge should not be susceptible to national antipathy any more than of malice towards individuals whilst exercising his office."<sup>66</sup>

While the Revolution was in progress Wythe's fortunes were sadly depleted through the mismanagement of his estates, and the heavy expense to which he was put while away from home performing his official duties. In 1779, a dishonest manager of his Hampton estate carried over to the enemy the larger part of the slaves which he had inherited from his father.<sup>67</sup> Some of his immediate relatives were impoverished to such an extent during the Revolution, that Wythe found it necessary to give them considerable financial aid. He settled one-half of his Elizabeth county estate on his nephew, and sold the other half, but the money was not paid him until years afterwards. Therefore, to meet his expenses he had to depend almost exclusively on his salary as Chancellor, which for many years was only 200 pounds. True, he derived some little income from his professorship at William and Mary College, but when created sole Chancellor he found it necessary to resign from the chair of municipal law, and reside in Richmond. In spite of his financial

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<sup>65</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 221.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, VI., 1, 63.







embarrassment, Wythe always managed to meet his debts, maintain his independence, live respectably, and at the same time do a large amount of charitable work.<sup>68</sup>

When the Federal Convention met in Philadelphia, in 1787, to amend the Articles of Confederation, Wythe was one of the delegates representing Virginia. Along with James Madison and other prominent Virginians in the convention, he early took the position that the Articles of Confederation were inadequate, and that a new constitution was necessary in order that the States might be bound together in a firmer union. Nevertheless, the death of his wife compelled him to leave the convention before it had long been in session, and it was never possible for him to return.<sup>69</sup>

Before its adjournment, the Federal Convention had passed an ordinance to the effect that the constitution must be ratified by nine of the thirteen States before becoming effective. Even before the election of delegates to the Virginia Convention which met in Richmond on June 2, 1788, to consider the adoption of the constitution, it was apparent that Virginia would cast the deciding vote. The knowledge of this fact caused intense excitement to prevail throughout the State. The friends of the constitution, knowing that they were in the minority, resorted to a shrewd scheme in order to carry the convention. The majority of the great soldiers and statesmen of the State were in favor of ratification, and they commanded large personal followings even among the enemies of the constitution. By inducing these men to become candidates a small majority in favor of ratification was secured in the convention. This convention, the most notable Virginia has ever produced, contained all the most distinguished men of the State, with the exception of Jefferson, R. H. Lee, Washington, and Nelson.<sup>70</sup>

On June 4, the committee of the whole, with Wythe as chairman, began its discussion of the constitution.<sup>71</sup> Madison, Pendleton, Nicholas, Randolph, and Marshall pictured the

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<sup>68</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV., 183.

<sup>69</sup>Madison's *Works*, I., 328, 339.

<sup>70</sup>Henry, *Life, Correspondence and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, II., 338-350.

<sup>71</sup>*Debates of Virginia Convention*, 1776.



dangers of anarchy and disunion in case of delay, and freely used the name of Washington in urging the immediate adoption of the constitution. Patrick Henry, ably seconded by Mason, Harrison, Tyler, and others, opposed its adoption on the ground that it was converting a loose confederation of States into a great consolidated national union. He clearly foresaw that a divided sovereignty was impossible, and that after the States had once entered into such a compact they could only withdraw by force of arms. Wythe, on account of his position as chairman of the committee of the whole, took little part in the debates. Yet he was a firm supporter of the constitution on the ground that the Articles of Confederation had proved inadequate, because the confederation had neither the energy nor the power necessary to preserve the nation, and therefore, the happiness of the country depended on its adoption.<sup>72</sup>

The convention remained in session three weeks, during which time every provision of the constitution was thoroughly discussed clause by clause. It was then evident that the Federalists could not muster a majority for unqualified adoption.<sup>73</sup> There were a large number of delegates in the convention who were opposed to the constitution as originally drawn up, but who favored its ratification, provided certain amendments were made beforehand. To secure the support of these members, Wythe proposed a resolution of ratification on June 24, which provided that amendments should be recommended to Congress on its first session under the constitution. Wythe thus stands forth as a strong advocate of subsequent amendments as opposed to previous amendment, supported by Henry and the other Anti-Federalists. Wythe's resolution met with bitter opposition, but it was finally adopted by a vote of 88 to 80. In accordance with the provisions of the resolution of ratification, a committee with Wythe as its chairman was appointed to draw up the desired amendments and present them to the first session of Congress. Twenty amendments were subsequently proposed, some of which were adopted in 1791.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 13, 1806.

<sup>73</sup>Henry, *Life, Correspondence, and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, II., 364-365.

<sup>74</sup>Rowland, *Life of George Mason*, II., 269.



After Wythe became sole Chancellor in 1788, his heavy official duties and the increasing burdens of age compelled him to take a less active part in the political affairs of his State. Although he was no longer a professor at William and Mary College, yet his love for teaching was so great that for many years he maintained a private school in Richmond. In conducting this school, Wythe was prompted largely by charitable motives, for he never received any compensation whatsoever from many of his poorer pupils.<sup>75</sup> While engaged in this work, Wythe became acquainted with Henry Clay, who was filling a small clerkship in the High Court of Chancery in 1793. Clay was his secretary for four years and during that time he acquired a fairly good knowledge of law.<sup>76</sup>

On account of his modest and retiring disposition, there are few records left concerning Wythe's private life. In stature he was of average size, well formed and proportioned. His features were handsome, manly and engaging, but he lacked that ease of manner characteristic of a man of the world like Edmund Pendleton.<sup>77</sup> Wythe was always neat and punctilious in his dress until he was well past middle life, but in his old age he showed the usual tendency to be careless. Wythe was married twice, but very little is known concerning his married life. His first wife, the daughter of his law teacher, Mr. Lewis, died while the Federal Convention was in session at Philadelphia. He later married Miss Taliaferro, who belonged to one of the wealthy and aristocratic families of Williamsburg. Wythe left no descendant, as his only child died in infancy. It may be inferred that his domestic relations were happy, since nothing was ever said to the contrary.<sup>78</sup>

Wythe's character was noted for its plainness and republican simplicity. After his thirtieth year, he was temperate in every respect, and was distinguished for his extraordinary goodness and kindness.<sup>79</sup> He took Mr. Mumford as an orphan boy into his home, educated him, and treated him as a son. He not only

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<sup>75</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 13, 1806.

<sup>76</sup>Rogers, *The True Henry Clay*, 24.

<sup>77</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14, 205.

<sup>78</sup>Sanderson, *Biography of The Signers*, IV., 187.

<sup>79</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 13, 1806.





freed the three slaves that remained after the flight of his Hampton manager, but he also made ample provision for their support, and gave the boy an excellent education.<sup>80</sup> After his removal to Richmond, Wythe lived in a yellow frame house, with a hip roof, situated on the corner of Fifth and Grace streets. The lot, which covered half a square, was cultivated as a market garden for several years after Wythe's death. The dilapidated and untenanted house was used by the boys of the city as a gymnasium, but was afterwards torn down to give place to some of the most fashionable residences of to-day.<sup>81</sup> Wythe was modest, gentle, and unassuming, and his mild temper was seldom irritated except by his zeal for his country's good. Like many other distinguished men Wythe was not without his eccentricities. He sometimes bowed in persons calling on business, attended to it, and then politely bowed them out of the house without speaking a word. In his old age, he was in the habit of going very early, in rather disordered dress, to a neighboring bakery to buy his own bread, and for days successively he would put down his money and take up his bread without uttering a word. Judge Beverly Tucker was accustomed to relate the following anecdote: "Mr. Wythe visited nobody but his relative, Mrs. Taliaferro, who lived four miles from Williamsburg, and being a great walker he always went on foot, sometimes taking young Mumford with him. One day as they set out together, Mumford said on leaving Williamsburg, 'A fine evening sir,' to which, as they entered Mrs. Taliaferro's home, the old man replied, 'Yes, a very fine evening.'" Judge Tucker further says that from childhood he was taught to venerate Wythe as the purest of human beings, and that the boys always beheld the pale and extenuated old man with a feeling akin to superstitious awe.<sup>82</sup>

Throughout their entire lives Wythe and Jefferson remained the warmests of friends. For years they carried on a most intimate and confidential correspondence. In these letters we

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<sup>80</sup>*American Law Journal*, III., 76.

<sup>81</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 92.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid*, 93.



find discussions of subjects ranging from Wythe's belief that the best treatment for rheumatism was, "To wear sheep's clothing," and Jefferson's ideas on the subject of ploughing corn, to their opinions on philosophical and scientific subjects.<sup>83</sup> When Jefferson was compiling his great parliamentary manual, it was to Wythe that he turned for material, advice, and assistance. Wythe was always an ardent book-lover. He had a large personal library, and in addition he was constantly sending his books to Jefferson and receiving others in return. While Jefferson was in Europe he secured a large collection of rare old books and sent them to Wythe, who was especially interested in books of that kind. About 1795 Wythe's right hand became so badly affected with rheumatic gout that he was unable to use it in writing, but with his customary perseverance, he set to work and soon learned to use the pen with his left.<sup>84</sup>

Many writers have charged Wythe with being a sceptic in regard to religion, and others have even charged him with infidelity. When he attended William and Mary College, it had begun to acquire an unsavory reputation among religious people, on account of the scepticism of some of its professors. Under such influences, it is very probable that Wythe did become somewhat sceptical, and this was no doubt one of the reasons why he plunged into a life of dissipation immediately after the inheritance of his brother's estate. His faith was soon firmly reestablished, and after his thirtieth year he acquired a strong attachment for the Christian religion. In middle life his faith was again somewhat shaken for a brief period by the difficulties presented by sceptical writings, but these difficulties passed away years before his death.<sup>85</sup> At one time he told Mr. Duvall, who was his intimate friend, "That he never put his head on his pillow, but that he said the Lord's prayer, and that his great desire was to be holy and innocent." In giving his opinion of Wythe Mr. Duvall said, "I think he loved his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind,

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<sup>83</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, Series II., Vol. 84., Nos. 21, 22, 24, 19.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid* and Vol. 85, Nos. 70, 64.

<sup>85</sup>*American Law Journal* III., 94.



and with all his strength. His religion was one of deeds rather than of words, for he believed that faith without good works was of no avail." <sup>86</sup> Wythe never united with any denomination, but his Bible was his constant companion, and he attended church regularly. In his opinion morality was the only essential to a religious life, and forms of baptism and worship affected in no way the future salvation of a man. <sup>87</sup>

In his political views Wythe was a Republican and a strict constructionist of the Jeffersonian school. He was an opponent of John Adams' administration, of the Alien and Sedition Laws, and of standing armies. In 1800, and again in 1804, he was president of the College of Electors of Virginia, and each time his vote was cast for Jefferson. <sup>88</sup> In spite of the bitter party spirit displayed throughout the administrations of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson, Wythe never yielded to the rancor of party spirit, nor permitted differences of opinion to interfere in any way with his private friendships. He counted among his friends many of his warmest political opponents. <sup>89</sup>

When the Jay Treaty of 1795 was made public, it raised a storm of indignation. In Richmond the feeling against the treaty was so intense, that only two people in the entire city openly espoused it. This intensity of feeling at last culminated in a great public meeting being held to remonstrate against the treaty. This meeting issued a unanimous address to the president, setting forth in determined language Richmond's opposition to the treaty. The fact that Chancellor Wythe presided over the assembly is a circumstance that attracted considerable attention, inasmuch as he was noted for his moderation of character, and because he was president of the meeting which addressed the president in support of his proclamation of neutrality. <sup>90</sup> When Genet arrived in this country in 1793 and tried to dictate America's foreign policy, Wythe took a vigorous stand in opposition to his pretensions. In Richmond he was put at the head of a committee whose object was to give publicity to

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<sup>86</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, II., 28., 127.

<sup>87</sup>Collections of Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>88</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 13, 1806.

<sup>89</sup>*American Law Journal*, III., 97.

<sup>90</sup>*Madison's Works*, II., 43.







the indiscretions of Genet, and defeat his plans for involving the United States in European wars.<sup>91</sup>

In the year 1795, the General Assembly of Virginia adopted an act for collecting and publishing all laws relative to land, which had been passed from the first settlement of the colony to the year 1793. For the execution of this work a committee composed of Wythe, John Marshall, J. Brown, B. Washington, and J. Wickham was appointed. Jefferson, who had collected nearly all the laws from 1624 to 1795, sent his collection to Richmond for the use of Wythe. Some disagreement arose among the committeemen, and little progress had been made in the work when the act was repealed by the General Assembly in 1797.<sup>92</sup>

In 1795, Wythe collected and published in a folio volume all the opinions handed down by the High Court of Chancery up to that year. In those decisions rendered from 1777 to 1789, in which he dissented from the other judges, he gave the reasons for his difference of opinion. He also fully explained his position in those decisions he had rendered as sole Chancellor, which had been reversed by the Supreme Court of Appeals.<sup>93</sup> This volume affords the best means that we have of judging Wythe's ability as a writer and his style of diction. His writings are strong and vigorous in thought, but his manner of expression is formal and stilted, and is sometimes dry, laconic, and brief. He frequently used archaic expressions, at times allowing his pedantry to crop out, especially in his letters. He was particularly fond of quoting the Latin and Greek authors, and of displaying his knowledge of mathematical and philosophical subjects.<sup>94</sup>

During the last ten years of his life, Wythe took very little active part in the political affairs of his State. He devoted himself more and more to his private school, while continuing to perform the duties of the chancellorship with his accustomed energy and industry. The chancery business had now become very heavy for a man of Wythe's advanced age. His regular

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<sup>91</sup>*Madison's Works*, I., 595.

<sup>92</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, September 2, 1806.

<sup>93</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*.

<sup>94</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*.



and temperate manner of living gave him a strong constitution, and almost perfect health up to and within a short time of his death. Even in his old age his thirst for knowledge continued unabated, and in his eightieth year he began to read new Latin and Greek authors.<sup>95</sup>

Some years before his death Wythe made his last will and testament. Along with Jefferson and a majority of the other leading men of the time, he always favored the emancipation of the slaves. Not only had he freed his three remaining slaves—a man, a woman, and a boy—but in his will he bequeathed the greater part of his property in trust to support them. Richard Duvall, who was appointed executor, was given the house in Richmond and some small articles. To Thomas Jefferson, Wythe bequeathed his books and small philosophical apparatus, his silver cups, and his gold-headed cane. Jefferson's entire legacy was valued at about \$2,500. The remainder of his estate was bequeathed to George W. Sweeney, the grandson of Wythe's sister.<sup>96</sup>

During his lifetime the freedman died, and a codicil to the will increased the legacy to Michael Brown, the freed boy, with a provision that in case he should die before the age of twenty-one, his property should revert to Sweeney.<sup>97</sup> For several days before his death the chancellor had been confined to his home by indisposition. On May 25th, he was taken with cholera morbus, and on the 26th and 27th the rest of the family were seized with the same disorder. On June 1st, the mulatto boy died; then a few days later the negro woman also passed away. In the meantime yellow arsenic had been found in Sweeney's room, with strong circumstances pointing towards his guilt. It is supposed that Sweeney, indignant at the kindness and munificence shown the negro boy, had intended to poison him.<sup>98</sup> On the same morning that Wythe was stricken with cholera morbus, Sweeney put the poison in the coffee for breakfast, not expecting that the Chancellor would think of coming from his chamber, or

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<sup>95</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, II., 84., 7.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid, 28., 123, 126.

<sup>97</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 91.

<sup>98</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, II., 28., 121.



would be in any danger of partaking of the coffee. However, he did appear and drank of the coffee with the results already described.<sup>99</sup>

On opening the body of the boy, physicians said that the inflammation of the stomach and bowels was similar to that produced by poisoning. This thoroughly convinced Wythe that he himself, as well as the negro boy, had been poisoned by Sweeney. Wythe, therefore, added another codicil to his will disinheriting Sweeney and giving his property as well as that of the negro boy to be equally divided among the other grandchildren of his sister.<sup>100</sup> Throughout his illness he displayed unusual patience and fortitude, and on his deathbed he tried to complete some of the most important suits pending before the Court of Chancery. The efforts of the physicians to save his life were unavailing, and on June 8, 1806, he passed quietly away. On his deathbed he expressed his faith in God, and prayed for the salvation of his soul.<sup>101</sup>

When the physicians opened his body they found inflammation of the stomach and bowels and the case was in every way similar to that of the negro boy. Yet, in that day, medical science had not advanced sufficiently for the doctors to be absolutely certain whether the inflammation was due to arsenic or to some other cause. Sweeney was afterwards tried on the charge of murder, but the evidence of the prosecution was not strong enough to secure his conviction.<sup>102</sup> At the same time Sweeney was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and one hour on the pillory for forging Wythe's name, but the sentence was never carried out. He afterwards escaped from Virginia, and fled to the West, where he met a miserable death a few years later.<sup>103</sup>

During his illness, great solicitude had been expressed for the chancellor's recovery, and a solemn and almost unparalleled impression was produced on the public by his death. As soon as the news became known, the bells of Richmond were set

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<sup>99</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 91.

<sup>100</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, II., 28., 126.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 28., 123.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>B. B. Minor, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by The High Court of Chancery*, 91.







tolling, and the executive council immediately assembled in order to adopt an order of public procession. Mr. Mumford, who was a member of the council, was appointed to pronounce the funeral oration, and the 10th of June was selected as the day for the funeral ceremony to take place. On the appointed day, Mr. Mumford discoursed on the manifold virtues of the deceased Chancellor, emphasizing the fact that he had not been the infidel that some had supposed him to be. After the delivery of the funeral oration, an immense throng followed the remains to their final resting place at Saint John's church. The imposing procession was arranged in the following order: clergymen and orator of the day, the physicians, the executor and relations of the deceased, judges, members of the bar, officers of the High Court of Chancery, the governor, executive council and other State officials, the mayor, aldermen and common council of the city of Richmond, with a large crowd of citizens following. There was perhaps not another man in Virginia, whose body the same solemn procession would have followed to its grave. Thus passed away George Wythe, the honor of his own and the model of future generations.<sup>104</sup>

Thomas Jefferson, who had hoped to pass a large part of his old age with Wythe, once wrote a short sketch of him, which is possibly the best estimate we have of his life, work, and character. In his words, "No man ever left behind him a character more venerated than George Wythe. His virtue was of the purest kind; his integrity inflexible, and his justice exact; of warm patriotism, and devoted as he was to liberty and the natural and equal rights of men, he might truly be called the Cato of his country, without the avarice of a Roman; for a more disinterested person never lived. Temperance and regularity in all his habits gave him general good health, and his unaffected modesty and suavity of manners endeared him to everyone. He was of easy elocution, his language chaste, methodical in the arrangement of his matter, learned and logical in the use of it, and of great urbanity in debate, not quick of apprehension, but with a little time, profound in penetration and sound in conclusion. In his philosophy he was firm, and neither troubling, nor per-

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<sup>104</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 10, 1806.



haps trusting any one with his religious creed, he left to the world the conclusion that the religion must be good which could produce a life of such exemplary virtue." 105

Wythe's memory, like that of many other distinguished men, has not been duly honored by succeeding generations; but the people are awakening more and more to his true worth. On June 22, 1893, the Virginia State Bar Association placed in the chapel of William and Mary College a tablet as a tribute to his courage as a patriot, his ability as a judge, and his uprightness and purity as a lawyer.<sup>106</sup> Although his grave in the corner of Saint John's churchyard is still unmarked, yet the indications are that a fitting monument will soon be erected to his memory.

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<sup>105</sup>Jefferson, *Papers*, I., 14., 205.

<sup>106</sup>*William and Mary Quarterly, Historical Papers*, 1893, II., 67.



## JOHN LETCHER

BY E. B. PRETTYMAN, A. B.

Perhaps no strain in the blood of the American nation has been as little recognized for its part in the formation of the destinies of the people as has the Scotch-Irish of the Valley of Virginia. When the eighteenth century was almost one-third old, a hardy band of homeseekers, originally transported from their native Scotland into Ireland by James I, driven thence by religious persecution to emigrate to Pennsylvania, pushed westward to the Alleghenies and then swept southward through that magnificent valley and there settled. They flourished and grew, expanding westward, and claiming in time the vast areas to the banks of the Mississippi River, afterwards to be the States of Kentucky and Tennessee. As they grew, their influence reacted on the life of the eastern section of the mother State and served, more than any other, to give the Old Dominion the qualities that enabled her to guide and uphold the young republic until it was firmly established. It broke the backbone of the purely English aristocracy with solid frontier ideas of equality, tore down the Episcopal dominance with Scotch Presbyterianism, establishing religious tolerance, and mixed with the cavalier society the rugged qualities of the pioneer. It was this Scotch-Irish blood that instilled into the veins of Virginia that plain democracy, that resolute courage, that untamed love of liberty that have since been her life and her glory. From this stock came such mighty figures as Montgomery, Boone, Clark, Wayne, Robertson, Benton, Houston, Andrew Jackson, Calhoun, Stonewall Jackson!<sup>1</sup>

From this same blood was born the man who was destined to guide Virginia through the greatest crisis in its history sitting in

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<sup>1</sup>Fiske, *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors* II, 390-400.





the governor's chair through the hours of the War Between the States. John Letcher was born in Lexington, Rockbridge county, Virginia, on the 29th of March, 1813.<sup>2</sup> His parents were humble Scotch-Irish people. His father was William Letcher, a butcher. The family was of that class which carried the idea of their democracy into their religion, and made up the bone and sinew of the Methodist Church. They were very pious people and active church workers.

Young Letcher started to work as a carpenter at the age of fifteen years, spending all of his spare time at his books. By hard labor he gathered together sufficient capital to enable him to attend Randolph-Macon and Washington Colleges, the latter being in his home town. When twenty-three years old he took up the study of law in the office of the Hon. William Taylor, of Lexington, one of the ablest lawyers of the section. Taylor was the son-in-law of Thomas H. Benton, of Missouri, <sup>3</sup> and from this source the young lawyer drew much of his political creed. Three years later he was admitted to the bar, and entered active politics.

In 1839 the Loco Foco faction of the Democratic party, in Rockbridge county, under the leadership of James McDowell, who was the brother-in-law of Thomas H. Benton, established in Lexington a newspaper—the *Valley Star*—to oppose the Whig organ in that district, *The Lexington Gazette*. John Letcher was put in the editorial chair and at once entered with great zeal into the activities of the campaign.<sup>4</sup> The Democratic party throughout the Valley was well organized, being known throughout the State as the "Tenth Legion." It was in its ranks that Letcher began his career. In this, his first campaign, he supported Van Buren and his financial policies, Benton's policy in regard to public lands,<sup>5</sup> attacked Wm. C. Rives (formerly Democratic

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<sup>2</sup>The material for his early life was gathered from accounts in:

*Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, December 22, 1860;

An address of Mr. Shields, of Lexington on Memorial Day, 1908;

*Leader in The Councils of the Confederate States*, *Baltimore Sun*;

*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 27, 1884.

*Charlottesville Advance*, July 2, 1892.

<sup>3</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, May 5, 1840.

<sup>4</sup>*Valley Star*, November 28, 1839.

*Lexington Gazette*, October 24, 1839.

<sup>5</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, December 24, 1839.



senator, but now turned Whig) in his campaign for the United States Senate, and supported McDowell for the place.<sup>6</sup>

In keeping with the administration policies he attacked the Bank of the United States at Philadelphia without restraint, referring to it as "that notorious swindling concern,"<sup>8</sup> "that bankrupt and fraudulently bankrupt concern," and declaring that the bank was "the most rotten concern in America."<sup>7</sup> He opposed not only the United States Bank but the entire plan of depositing federal funds in banks, State or national, exclaiming "Away with the idea that banks are the only safe depositories for public funds!"<sup>9</sup> and "I stated distinctly that I was opposed to the whole banking system."<sup>10</sup>

In a series of able editorials he supported Van Buren's policy of an independent treasury, with sub-treasuries in the States.<sup>11</sup> He was a "hard money" man, following closely after Benton. He opposed the distribution of the proceeds of public lands among the States<sup>12</sup> and upheld Thomas H. Benton in his policy in this regard.<sup>13</sup> Calhoun, now turned administration Democrat, came in for a share of Letcher's commendation.<sup>14</sup>

At this time in the State canvass, Letcher stood for three policies: first, he held that the governor should have removed the State funds from the banks, and should have required that all State taxes be paid in specie; second, the Legislature should enforce the penalties incurred by banks suspending payment; third, the James River Canal should not be continued but should be stopped at Lynchburg.<sup>15</sup>

Letcher was blunt of expression and vigorous in statement. He minced no words and the bitter State and national campaign became bitterest in his district. Votes there were evenly divided, Augusta and Rockbridge counties being Whig, but the Eleventh District, of which they were a part, being Democratic. The

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<sup>6</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, December 17, 1839.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, November 30, 1839.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, October 24, 1839.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, May 25, 1839.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, February 1839, series signed "Another Republican of '93."

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, May 25, 1839; June 15, 1839; July 9-16, 1840.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, December 17, 1839.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, December 24, 1839.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, November 30, 1839.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, January 28, 1840.



*Richmond Whig* remarked of that campaign, "Odious in many counties for the spirit of unfairness and misrepresentation which characterized it, there seems to have been infused into the Van Buren canvass of Rockbridge a vindictive rancor and ferocity which existed nowhere else."<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 1840, Letcher plunged still deeper into the fray, and was nominated with John W. Brockenborough by the Loco Focos for the House of Delegates.<sup>17</sup> The issue was mainly on the bank question and the policy of specie payments, and the campaign became still more bitter. The Whigs were finally victorious and General C. P. Dorman and Dr. A. Leyburn were elected over Letcher and his running-mate.<sup>18</sup> Letcher took the stump during this canvass,<sup>19</sup> and after his defeat, remained in the field for the national Democratic ticket, traveling all through Augusta, Rockbridge and Botetourt counties.<sup>20</sup> He was a forceful speaker, engaging in joint debates as well as in mere political orations.<sup>21</sup> In the final count, however, of November, 1840, while Virginia returned a majority for Martin Van Buren and his policies, Rockbridge with a heavy vote gave Harrison a majority of 104.<sup>22</sup> The district, however, went Democratic, the same as usual.

In December of the same year Letcher retired from the editorship of the *Valley Star*, and went back to the practice of law, being succeeded by John W. Brockenbrough. Even his bitter enemy, *The Lexington Gazette* said as he retired, "He has been sincere and we do not therefore condemn him for his political faith."

Letcher held to his platform during the next years and rose in the ranks of the politicians of the section. In 1842 he supported his old leader, McDowell, for governor, against Andrew Stevenson, and favored the renomination of Martin Van Buren for the presidency in 1844. The efforts of R. M. T. Hunter and others of Calhoun's friends to gain for the South Carolinian the nomina-

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<sup>16</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, May 5, 1840.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, March 10, 1840.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, April 28, 1840.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, April 14, 1840.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, August 18, 1840; September 1, 1840.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, September 1, 1840.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, November 12, 1840.







tion, and their efforts to make the Democratic party of Virginia a strictly state-rights and pro-slavery party,<sup>23</sup> were vigorously opposed by Letcher. In this course he was in line with Ritchie, who, however, supported Stevenson for the governorship.<sup>24</sup>

Late that year Letcher wrote Benton, as follows, regarding conditions in Virginia,<sup>25</sup> first stating the certainty of McDowell's election, which was conceded by enemies as well as by friends: "The state of parties in the Legislature is as favorable to Mr. Van Buren as his most ardent friends could desire. The majority is large, fully two to one, in the Assembly, and much larger with the mass of the people. I can well imagine your surprise when I inform you that Ritchie is himself friendly to the election of Mr. Van Buren—indeed takes him as his first choice over all who are spoken of in connection with the presidency. He regards his election as essential to the purity of Republican principles—as the only fitting and proper rebuke to the log-cabin and coon-skin fooleries of 1840. From all the indications that I have been able to collect I do not think that Van Buren has much to apprehend from Calhoun as a rival. Mr. Calhoun's inconsistencies upon all the prominent questions that have been before the nation for the past twenty years have stript him of that confidence and regard which the mass of the people once reposed in him. If he should receive the nomination of our party for the high office to which he aspires, he will receive a cold and inefficient support."

However, it early became evident to Letcher that the Calhounites would force the issue on the annexation of Texas. Van Buren had been adverse to the plan. The South was solidly in favor of it, and it was plain to him that unless some remedial steps were taken, danger was ahead for Martin Van Buren. Letcher disclosed, in a letter to Ritchie, the course which Calhoun would adopt toward Van Buren. Referring to the Calhounites, he wrote "Unless I am greatly deceived in information lately obtained, they are preparing to stack the cards on us. You will recollect a letter on the annexation of Texas, written by Gil-

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<sup>23</sup>Ambler—*Sectionalism in Virginia*, 233.

<sup>24</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, January 25, 1844.

<sup>25</sup>*Van Buren Mss.*, December 15, 1842.



mer,<sup>26</sup> and which made its appearance last winter. That letter was sent to General Jackson in manuscript, and in reply to the request which accompanied it, the Old Hero wrote out his views at large showing particularly the advantages of it (Texas) in a military point of view to the United States. This letter I understand is in the possession of the Calhounites, and is to be used at the Baltimore convention. Mr. Van Buren is to be interrogated about the time of the meeting of that body, and it is expected that he will answer in opposition to the scheme. Mr. Calhoun is to approve the annexation and his answer is to be at the convention ready for use."<sup>27</sup> This letter was sent to Van Buren by Wm. H. Roane, in October, 1843, together with a letter asking for information and suggesting counter-moves—"neither Ritchie nor I recollect your position in regard to it (the annexation)—your own judgment will prompt your course of movement—being forewarned of the game to be played, I hope you will be able to trump their crowning tricks. \* \* \* Anything you may choose to communicate on this or any other subject will be discreetly used \* \* \* should you be interrogated at the time and in the manner indicated in L's (Letcher's) letter would it not be as well to have a cross-fire upon the enemy? And level certain interrogations at Mr. Calhoun about some of his bygone opinions, or his present opinion in regard to the Rights of Minorities?"<sup>28</sup>

Van Buren, however, maintained a strict silence on this question. Warned even thus far ahead he took no steps to off-set the scheme. Perhaps it did not then appear as urgent as it later proved to be. The campaign went on, Van Buren gaining in strength until Calhoun announced the withdrawal of his name for the presidential nomination in an address to his "political friends and supporters," published on January 31, 1844, the day before the meeting of the Virginia State Convention at Richmond.<sup>29</sup> That convention, therefore, in perfect harmony and

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<sup>26</sup>Gilmer was a former Governor, and a State Rights Whig.

<sup>27</sup>*Van Buren Mss.*, September 23, 1843.

<sup>28</sup>*Van Buren Mss.*, October 17, 1843.

<sup>29</sup>Turner, *Essays in American History*, 190;  
*Lexington Gazette*, February 15, 1844.



amid great enthusiasm voted for Martin Van Buren for the nomination.<sup>30</sup>

Letcher took the stump for the ticket and traveled through his Congressional District in a vigorous canvass.<sup>31</sup> He was rapidly assuming a position among the leaders in that part of the State. He resumed the editorship of the *Valley Star* during the campaign.

Events then began to move rapidly. On March 22d, as predicted by Letcher, General Jackson's letter to A. V. Brown, of Tennessee, warmly advocating the annexation of Texas on the ground of military necessity was published in the *Richmond Enquirer*.<sup>32</sup> (By a typographical error, corrected by Ritchie in the next issue, the date of this letter was published February 12, 1844, instead of 1843.) The Calhounites had kept the contents of the letter hid for over a year! Immediately the Van Burenites in Virginia sought to find out the position of their candidate in regard to this now all-important question. W. H. Hammett, and Jefferson Davis, of Mississippi, interrogated him directly. An answer was delayed them for over a month. Then Van Buren in a carefully written letter came out in opposition to annexation.<sup>33</sup>

Immediately came a split in the party in Virginia. In a Democratic meeting called in Richmond the next day Ritchie drew up, submitted and carried a set of resolutions urging "the propriety of relieving their delegates to the Baltimore convention from the instructions which now bind them, leaving them to the exercise of sound discretion or even to instruct them, if they deem it expedient to do so, to cast the vote of Virginia in favor of men known and pledged to be in favor of annexation."<sup>34</sup> Ritchie stated that he regretted the action taken by Van Buren, and that he would stand for right and Democratic principles.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Turner, *Essays in American History*, 191.

<sup>31</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, March 7, 1844.

<sup>32</sup>Turner, *Essays in American History*, 194, quoting *Richmond Enquirer*, March 22, 1844.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 195, quoting *Richmond Enquirer*, April 30, 1844.

*Lexington Gazette*, May 9, 1844.

<sup>34</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, May 16, 1844.

<sup>35</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, May 22, 1844, reprint in *Lexington Gazette*, May 23, 1844.







Under his guidance the vote of Virginia was swung to Lewis Cass, of Michigan, in the convention which met in Baltimore in May, until the ninth ballot when James K. Polk, the first "dark horse" in American politics, was given the nomination.<sup>36</sup>

As to what was Letcher's stand in this division in the party, we have no direct information. It is probable, however, that he remained true to Van Buren, and opposed to immediate annexation. As Thomas H. Benton did not falter in his support of Van Buren during all this uproar,<sup>37</sup> it is to be supposed that McDowell, his kinsman and close political friend, followed him; and Letcher, as we have mentioned, was one of McDowell's closest political aids all through these years. It is safe therefore to put Letcher down as a true Van Burenite, and opposed to the immediate annexation of Texas. After the convention Letcher actively took the stump in the national campaign for "Polk and Texas" and helped to carry numbers of the western counties Democratic.

During this campaign Letcher met, fell in love with, and married Miss Susan Holt, of Augusta county, a relative of General Sam Houston, of Texas.<sup>38</sup>

After this campaign Letcher took up the practice of law again and nothing more can be learned of him until 1847, when the question of negro slavery again became a great issue in the State. In that year Letcher's name appeared on the famous "Ruffner pamphlet," published in Lexington in September. Such was the bearing of this address on his subsequent career that it may not be out of place to outline its contents before going further.

Since 1830 the section of Virginia west of the Alleghanies and in the Valley had been rapidly growing, both in population and in wealth. As it grew, its jealousy of the power held by the eastern section in the government of the State grew proportionately, and a struggle began. The east, in protection of its slave interests, held desperately to its balance of power, as the west was practically non-slave-holding and largely anti-slavery.

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<sup>36</sup>Turner, *Essays in American History*, 200.

<sup>37</sup>Rogers, *Thos. H. Benton*, 225-227.

<sup>38</sup>*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 27, 1884.



Resolutions providing for a reapportionment of State representation on a white suffrage basis, with a view to giving the west a share in the government in proportion to its population, were defeated in each Assembly from 1841 by solid eastern majorities. With each defeat the spirit of the westerners grew more determined and talk of dismemberment of the State began to become current.<sup>39</sup>

In this state of affairs a debate took place in the Franklin Society of Lexington on the subject:—"Should the people of western Virginia delay any longer in taking steps to bring about a division of the State." The debate lasted from January 30, 1847, to April 24, 1847.<sup>40</sup> The discussion found a hinge on the slavery question and John Letcher made three speeches urging action to bring about dismemberment of the State and to remove negro slavery from the western section. Dr. Henry Ruffner, president of Washington College, was also in the debate on the same side with Letcher. Afterwards—in September, 1847—Letcher, with a number of other citizens, wrote to Dr. Ruffner asking him to publish his "not only able but unanswerable argument in favor of a removal of the negro population from western Virginia," adding, "We cannot expect that you will now be able to furnish us with the speech as it was delivered, nor is it our wish that you confine yourself to the views then expressed. Our desire is to have the whole argument in favor of the proposition presented to the public in a perspicuous and condensed form."<sup>41</sup> Dr. Ruffner replied that he would do as requested, also adding, "As we are nearly all slaveholders and none of us approve of the principles and measures of the sect of abolitionists, we think that no one can be offended with us for offering to the people an argument whose sole object is to show that the prosperity of our west Virginia—if not of east Virginia also—would be promoted by removing gradually the institution of slavery, in a manner consistent with the rights and interests of slaveholders."

The Pamphlet first stated the attitude universally held in the

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<sup>39</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 251-255.

<sup>40</sup>*Political Pamphlets* (at Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.)

<sup>41</sup>*Ruffner Pamphlet*, (reprinted in Wheeling, W. Va., 1862.)



west at that time, that no further steps should be taken in regard to the injustice of the east in regard to representation in the State government until the census of 1850 should show the real status of the two sections; "then you will make a final and decisive effort to obtain your just weight in the government." He proposed to strengthen the cause of the west in its effort to obtain a white suffrage basis of representation, by joining to that issue the slavery question. The first effort at gradual emancipation had been made in 1832, and was defeated by the east. Since then its advocates had kept silent, until the "fanatical violence of the Northern anti-slavery men" had created "an unfavorable change."

Ruffner bitterly assailed abolition and abolitionists as foes to gradual emancipation, referring to them as "smitten with moral insanity," and characterized by "unprincipled calumnies," a "tempest of fanaticism," and saying "Now the abolitionists may boast, if they will, that they have done more in this time to rivet the chains of the slave, and to fasten the curse of slavery upon the country, than all the pro-slavery men in the world have done, or could do, in half a century." In regard to them he said "We repudiate all connection with themselves, their principles and their measures (as) aiming to subvert the Federal Constitution, which guarantees the rights of slave-holders, and to destroy the Federal Union, which is the glory and the safe-guard of us all."

The ground of gradual emancipation was then taken—"against the one party we affirm the right of slaveholding under present conditions; against the other party we affirm the expediency of removing slavery from west Virginia, and from every other State or portion of a State where the number of slaves is not too large." "We disclaim all intention to interfere with slavery in east Virginia ——— All that we ask of our eastern brethren in regard to this matter, is that if west Virginia shall call for a law to remove slavery from her side of the Blue Ridge, east Virginia shall not refuse her consent." An elaborate argument showed how it would be feasible to have one-half of the State slaveholding and the other half free.

Ruffner then proceeded to his real argument, that slavery







retarded the progress of States, in population, in industries, and in education. He then outlined a scheme for the removal of slavery from west Virginia, embodying a prohibition of further slave importation, the encouragement of slave exportation, and the emancipation of all slaves born after a set date at an age not exceeding twenty-five years.

Attached to the request for the publication of this address were eleven names of prominent citizens of Lexington, including that of John Letcher. It had been agreed that these men would share the cost of the publication. But, for some reason not mentioned until 1858, when the Pamphlet began to attract attention they refused to do so.<sup>42</sup> Letcher claimed later that many expressions were added to the original debate in the published one and this change of attitude was unexpected and unapproved by them.<sup>43</sup>

The Pamphlet when printed did not meet with the enthusiasm expected. The Valley claimed that such a step was exceedingly ill-timed on account of the abolition activities of the time; the Trans-Alleghany more or less approved it, but the east denounced it as abolitionist.<sup>44</sup> This was the famous Ruffner incident which later set Virginia on fire and almost kept John Letcher out of the governor's chair.

In 1848, Letcher served the State as presidential elector on the Democratic ticket,<sup>45</sup> which cast the vote of Virginia for Lewis Cass, of Michigan.

In the meantime, with James McDowell as governor, the cause of the west was everywhere gaining in strength.<sup>46</sup> Finally in 1850, a bill was passed by the Legislature, providing for a Constitutional Convention, members to be apportioned on the so-called Mixed Basis, i. e., one delegate for every 13,151 white inhabitants, and every \$7,000.24 taxes paid into the State Treasury. This gave the east, with all of her slave property, 76 delegates and the west 59. The Trans-Alleghany made a vigor-

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<sup>42</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, July 2, 1858; August 6, 1858.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, July 2, 1858.

<sup>44</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 245.

<sup>45</sup>*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 27, 1844.

<sup>46</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 257-259.



ous fight against the ratification of the bill, but the Valley went solidly with the east for it.<sup>47</sup>

During this canvass, Letcher was questioned regarding his connection with the Ruffner Pamphlet, and he stated that he had changed his opinion on the question of slavery, and declared that if his fidelity to the institution was doubted by any one it was that one's duty to oppose his election to any office.<sup>48</sup> The main issue in the elections all over the State was the basis of representation in the Legislature. The east wanted representation to be apportioned according to population plus taxes, thus giving that section, on account of its slave property, a majority of power. The west insisted upon a purely white population basis for the apportionment.

The election for delegates was held on August 22, 1850. Letcher ran as a reform Democrat and was elected from Augusta District with four Whigs, D. E. Moore, H. W. Sheffey, A. Stevenson and David Fultz<sup>49</sup>—Letcher leading the ticket with 1,939 votes.<sup>50</sup> East of the Blue Ridge, Henry A. Wise, of Accomac, was the only white-basis delegate elected, while west of that dividing line, not one mixed-basis man was elected.<sup>51</sup>

The convention met at Richmond in October, 1850. Letcher took a leading part in the first sessions, consistently voting with the minority. He was appointed on the Committee on Executive Department and Ministerial Officers.<sup>52</sup> The convention adjourned on November 4th,<sup>53</sup> to await the result of the census. It reassembled on January 6, 1851, and the actual work of the "Reform Convention of 1850-51" was on. On the 28th of that month, the Committee on the Executive Department reported, Letcher and Carlile submitting a minority report embodying the stand of the west on the questions involved. This report was to insert in place of the section of the regular report providing for the election of the governor for a term of four years, to be

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<sup>47</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 260.

<sup>48</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, July 2, 1859.

<sup>49</sup>*Journal of Convention of 1850-'51*.

<sup>50</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, August 24, 1850.

<sup>51</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 261.

<sup>52</sup>*Journal of Convention of 1850-'51*.

<sup>53</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, November 5, 1850.



ineligible for a second term, a section providing for a term of two years, the candidate to be eligible for a second term, and also a section providing that the treasurer and public auditor be elected by the people instead of by the Legislature.<sup>54</sup> The report was laid on the table after being ordered printed, and Letcher took no part in the long debate on the subject.

On February 27th, R. M. T. Hunter submitted a resolution providing for the appointment of a committee of five to consider and report "what limitations upon the powers of the several departments of the government, or guarantees in other form it may be expedient to insert in the new or amended Constitution with special reference to the object of providing ample and effective protection and security to the slave interests." Letcher was appointed on this all-important committee.<sup>55</sup>

The basis of representation was the next question up, and the great debate of the convention began. The committee appointed to determine the proper basis disagreed 12 to 12. This was almost a fight for existence on the part of the west.

On March 14th, in the Committee of the Whole, Letcher gained the floor for his first great speech.<sup>56</sup> His style was clear but impassioned. He spoke from and of the west and the speech was a strong expression of the thought and nature of the section. He began with a peroration on his native section, and continued—"I come here as one of the native-born sons of that great west to demand for my people nothing but what is right—to demand at the hands of this convention those rights which will secure to the people of western Virginia that political equality and political power which is enjoyed by the people of eastern Virginia." He asserted that if the doctrine of "Interests" (meaning slave interests) as portrayed by the easterners was what guided the east, then "it is time for the west to separate" from the east. He then pointed out the unfairness of the election of delegates to the convention, the west not getting its just share of representatives. Then Letcher made a statement destined to become famous \* \* \* "The fact is that the gentlemen of the

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<sup>54</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, January 31, 1851.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, February 28, 1851.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, Supplement No. 26, 1851.







east have but one idea in their heads, and that is 'negro-ology.' They can never see beyond it; and to their peculiar notions regarding its perpetuation, everything must conform.' "

The speech then became very bitter and sarcastic in regard to the boasted superiority of the east. He showed figures to disprove arguments of the east in regard to the protection of property under the white basis government. The east, in a bitter and sarcastic outburst, was denounced because of its inconsistency on the subject of slavery, the speaker going back to 1816 in support of his positions. Letcher took up several points taken by R. G. Scott, of Richmond. Then changing his ground, Letcher attacked the stand taken by the east against money for internal improvements in the west, because of the debt that would be thus incurred; he showed that the State was already \$8,700,000 in debt for improvements in the east, and attacked the proposal of the east to defer payment of this amount for 30 or 50 years, by which time the west would have grown sufficiently to pay off the debt in taxes.

The passage following this was impassioned. Starting with the question "What have we met for?" he answered, "To amend the Constitution of the State. Why so? Because it was objectionable to a majority of the people of the State. If a Constitution cannot be made agreeable to all the people, then it must be made agreeable to a majority of the people and a majority of their interests. And yet the easterners say that there shall be no adoption of a Constitution not having in it the mixed basis. Are they thus to stifle popular want? Not a single man in the convention can say that he believes the mixed basis is wanted by the majority of the people of the State. And yet the power is sought to be retained in the hands of the minority, and a Constitution forced upon the majority against their consent. Do the gentlemen know with whom they are dealing? Do they believe that the western people are slaves—that all sense of their rights has departed from them and that they have not the power, the will, and the determination to resist a tyrannical spirit like this?"

\* \* \* Let me tell the gentlemen that there is danger ahead, if this course is persevered in \* \* \* If they



want a division of the State, they are taking every effective means to bring about so sad a result."

The people in the west, he claimed, had all the requirements for statehood and would follow the example of Maine, if need be. Passing on, Letcher took up some statements that had been made to the effect that all party lines were broken in the east on the question of the mixed basis, and exclaimed "I want to tell the gentlemen that party lines are also down in the west! I am ready to throw down the party flag, and trample it in the dust whenever it shall become necessary for me to degrade the western people in order to give my party the ascendancy in Virginia. If the party can only be sustained at the expense of equality, you must get other hands to do the work. I will not do it, for one."

The eastern Democrats had framed their apportionment under the mixed basis so that the Democratic party would receive eight more delegates than really belonged to it. Letcher viciously ridiculed the idea that the Democratic west could thus be brought to support the plan \* \* \* "How true is the lesson taught by experience, that one act of injustice necessarily drives its perpetrators to the commission of another!"

Finally on April 30th, a motion to strike out the white basis of representation was carried by a strictly sectional vote—65 to 59, Letcher voting "Nay."<sup>57</sup> A motion to insert the mixed-basis plan was rejected—60 to 61, by the same lines, except that five eastern delegates switched.

The proposition then before the Committee of the Whole was John Minor Botts' compromise, which was for a division of the State into two parts, eastern and western, to have equal numbers of representatives in the Assembly, the House to be elected on the suffrage basis and the Senate on the federal basis. However, on May 1st, Botts was allowed, by a vote of 64 to 57, to withdraw his proposition in order to await the result of a canvass of his constituents on the subject. Letcher voted "Aye."

All this debate and discussion worked the people of the State up to a high state of excitement. The west was bitterly opposed to anything like compromise, and would approve nothing except

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<sup>57</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, May 2, 1851.



a straight white basis. Meetings were held all over the State and the people sent their delegates binding instructions. On May 8th, the convention was in an uproar all day and talk of dismemberment was rife. Letcher was very attentive all during this period, never being absent and voting consistently on all questions.

On Saturday, May 10th, both the eastern and the western delegates met in caucus, but no agreement could be reached.<sup>58</sup> On Monday, Martin, of Henry, moved that a committee of eight be elected—four eastern and four western delegates—to agree on a compromise. This was carried *viva voce*, and G. W. Summers, of Kanawha, Wm. Martin, of Henry, G. A. Wingfield, of Campbell, Wm. Lucas, of Jefferson, L. C. H. Finney, of Accomac, A. F. Caperton, of Monroe, Samuel Chilton, of Fauquier, and John Letcher, of Rockbridge, were elected. Letcher was elected on the fourth ballot. On the next day the committee submitted a report (all agreeing except Finney) providing for a House of Delegates composed of 150 members—82 from the west and 68 from the east—to be elected biennially; and a Senate of 50 members—30 from the east and 20 from the west—to be elected quadrennially; also providing “the General Assembly of 1865 shall reapportion representation, and if no basis shall be agreed upon, a vote of the people on a basis shall at once be ordered by the governor.”<sup>59</sup> The report was rejected by a vote of 55 to 54, Letcher voting not to reject.

Henry A. Wise moved to strike out the mixed basis and the motion was carried —57 to 56—(Martin, of Henry, switched) Letcher voting “aye.” It was then moved to strike out all of Botts’ compromise except the first section. This was carried —60 to 53, Letcher voting “Nay.”<sup>60</sup> Wise then brought in a proposition to fill in Botts’ compromise with the section that the House be composed of 81 members from the east and 69 from the west; and the Senate of 19 from the east and 17 from the west; also, directing a reapportionment in 1861 and *every ten years thereafter, on the suffrage basis*. On May 16th, this proposition

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<sup>58</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, May 13, 1851.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, May 16, 1851.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, May 16, 1851.







was rejected—58 to 53—Letcher voting against the rejection.<sup>61</sup>

Then Chilton re-proposed the proposition of the committee of eight, modified to read that if the Legislature in 1865 fail to agree on a basis for reapportionment the governor should submit to the people four propositions: suffrage basis, mixed basis, white-population basis, and taxation basis. A motion to reject this was lost—52 ayes to 56 nays, Letcher voting "Nay," and the proposition, practically the same as submitted by the committee, was inserted by a vote of 55 to 48, by the Committee of the Whole, Letcher voting with the majority. The west abandoned the suffrage basis and rallied to the support of the compromise. On the 19th of May, the suffrage basis was struck out by the convention, 80 to 2; the mixed basis was also struck out, 47 to 37. And on the 21st, the compromise as agreed on in the Committee of the Whole was inserted in the Constitution, with the change of one member being taken from the west and given the east in the House, by a vote of 51 to 44, Letcher voting "Aye."

The compromise did not suit either section and all over the State the people were in a turmoil.<sup>62</sup> Such was the state of affairs that on July 26th, Randolph moved a reconsideration of the question, but it was laid on the table by a vote of 67 to 58; Letcher voted to lay on the table.<sup>63</sup> Each faction of the delegates was willing to let the compromise go, in order to have the thing settled in some way. On July 31st, the Constitution was adopted.<sup>64</sup> The east had not succeeded in what she had expected, but she had thrown up, during the last days of the convention, abundant protection around her property and had guarantees against undue taxation of her slaves and any extravagant system of internal improvements.<sup>64</sup>

John Letcher returned home to find himself popular, with a reputation as a skillful debater and a man capable of attending to the interests of his constituency. Accordingly, he was that fall elected to Congress from the Augusta District. Although never the originator of great measures, he consistently struggled

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<sup>61</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, May 20, 1851.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, June 6, 1851.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, July 29, 1851.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, August 1, 1851.



in behalf of the interests of the South. He gained a national reputation as a ready speaker and rapidly rose to a position among the Democrats leaders on the floor. His particular interest lay in the financial side of legislation. He possessed a remarkable memory for figures and as a result of close study always had at his tongue's end every detail of the governmental financial policy. He fought all extravagant expenditures of public moneys and advocated constantly frugality and economy in appropriation.<sup>65</sup> By his attitude, he gained the national nickname of "Honest John" Letcher, the "Watch Dog of the Treasury." He was returned to Congress three times, serving through 1858. He was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee for part of his term, and thus was able to direct the execution of his economical policies of expenditure.

During this period of Letcher's stay in Washington in the national Congress, Wise, the governor of Virginia, whose election the west had approved, had fallen into great disfavor in that section because of his zeal for a strong pro-southern program and his repudiation of Buchanan's administration. R. M. T. Hunter had gained first place in the favor of the people there.<sup>66</sup> These two men were both looked upon as probable candidates for the presidency and each desired the support of Virginia in the contest, and hoped to gain this through the campaign for the governorship.<sup>67</sup> In 1858, in a meeting of Virginia's congressmen opposed to Wise, John Letcher, who was now a member of the Hunter faction, was named as their choice for the gubernatorial nomination. Letcher had become the idol of the Tenth Legion and because of his record had a strong hold on the Democrats of the Jeffersonian state rights school. The supporters of Wise favored Judge John W. Brockenbrough, a native of eastern Virginia, who had been judge for years in the western part of the State.

The contest as early as June, 1858, began to hinge on the slavery question, and the charge was brought against Letcher in that month, for his connection with the Ruffner Pamphlet,

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<sup>65</sup>*Congressional Record*, 1852-1858.

<sup>66</sup>*American Historical Review*, XV., 4, 774.

<sup>67</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 320.



of favoring a dismemberment of the State and of being anti-slavery.<sup>68</sup> The charge became the sole issue of the campaign. Letcher's friends claimed that this matter had been thrashed out before the people in Letcher's canvasses for the Reform Convention and for Congress, and had been explained to the satisfaction of the people.<sup>69</sup> The Wise faction kept insisting upon a statement from Letcher on the charge, and the controversy became more and more bitter.<sup>70</sup> Finally, on July 2d, a letter from Letcher was published.<sup>71</sup> The letter was frank and open. In it, Letcher stated: "At the time of the publication of that address, I state frankly, that I did regard slavery as a social and political evil. I did not regard it then, nor since, as a moral evil, for I was at that time, have been ever since, and am now the owner of slave property, by purchase and not by inheritance." He held in 1847 the same views as many other Virginians, but since then the subject had been more ably discussed, "which," said he, "has resulted in an almost entire revolution of public sentiment \* \* \* Previous to 1847, I had given very little consideration to it; subsequently, however, I did examine it and became completely satisfied not only that my opinion as to the social and political influence was erroneous, but I acknowledged my error—referring to the campaign for the Reform Convention. He referred to his record for substantiation.

By Letcher's friends, the explanation was accepted as sufficient. But the opposing faction set to work to make campaign thunder out of it. A letter was obtained from Dr. Ruffner, admitting that the signers of the request for the publication did not pay as he had expected, but he denied that anything had been put into the published address that was not in the original, and he pointed to the wording of the request in regard to Letcher's view of the publication.<sup>72</sup>

The split in the party then was complete. Letcher was assailed not because of his fidelity, but because his election would

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<sup>68</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 25, 1858.

<sup>69</sup>*Lynchburg Republican*, reprint in *Richmond Enquirer*, June 29, 1858.

<sup>70</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 29, 1858.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, July 2, 1858.

<sup>72</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, August 6, 1858.







make Virginia's attitude toward slavery appear equivocal,<sup>73</sup> and because of the fact that at a time when Virginia was fighting tooth and nail against the abolitionists, he was advocating emancipation and proposing a division of the State for the purpose.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, he was defended as a fearless advocate of the principles of strict construction and as an able Democrat of the most uncompromising character.<sup>75</sup>

In the heat of the canvass, about the last of August, 1858, there appeared in the newspapers a letter from the Hon. Sherard Clemens, a congressman from Wheeling, Virginia, stating that he had been authorized by Judge Brockenbrough to withdraw his name from the contest for the nomination.<sup>76</sup> This complicated matters. A week later, Judge Brockenbrough, in a public letter, denied that he had authorized Clemens to withdraw his name.<sup>77</sup> O. Jennings Wise, son of the governor and one of the editors of the *Richmond Enquirer*, then directly questioned Clemens' intentions.<sup>77</sup> Another week, and the entire correspondence between Clemens and Judge Brockenbrough was published and the lie was given Clemens by Wise. A challenge passed and in a pistol duel Clemens was seriously wounded. It was stated in the papers that Clemens was a supporter of John Letcher.<sup>78</sup> The duel is of especial interest because of Clemens' later activity in the defection of West Virginia.

In the meantime, both sides were claiming unfairness and trickery on the part of the other.<sup>79</sup> It was claimed, also, that as G. W. Summers, an anti-slavery man, would probably be the Whig candidate, much campaign material would be lost by the nomination of Letcher by the Democratic party.<sup>80</sup> Over and over again the claim was asserted: "This is not the time for Vir-

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<sup>73</sup>Charlottesville, Va., *Observer*, reprinted in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 6, 1858.

<sup>74</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, August 31, 1858.

<sup>75</sup>*Richmond South*, August 29, 1858.

<sup>76</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, August 31, 1858.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, September 7, 1858.

<sup>78</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, September 30, 1858.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, August 31, September 17, November 12, 1858.

*Lexington Star*, reprinted in *Enquirer*, September 21, 1858.

*Lexington Gazette*, reprinted in *Enquirer*, September 21, 1858.

*Lynchburg Republican*, reprinted in *Enquirer*, September 21, 1858.

<sup>80</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, August 31, 1858.



ginia to tinker with the negro question, and there is no necessity for mixing it up with the election for governor.”<sup>81</sup> Friends of Letcher, however, went through the records of almost every prominent public man of the day—including Governor Wise, James Lyons and John C. Calhoun—showing their utter inconsistencies and arguing that this inconsistency of their candidate on the subject of slavery was not vital.<sup>82</sup>

About the middle of October, the attack shifted to Letcher's course in the convention of 1850. His votes in regard to the taxation of slavery were brought out and assailed.<sup>83</sup> The phrase, “negro-ology” was repeated and echoed through the State.<sup>84</sup> He was also attacked bitterly as having know-nothing tendencies.<sup>85</sup> All the attacks, however, were inadequate to overcome the solidity of Letcher's record in regard to state rights, the integrity of his character, and the slogan, “Honest John.”

The State Convention met in Petersburg on December 3d. For days the house was in an uproar. Delegates declared that they would vote for anybody except Letcher. But when the vote came, Letcher received 51,528 votes, a majority of 17,520. The southwest and trans-Alleghany went against him, but a majority in all the other sections was for him.<sup>86</sup> Letcher wrote from Washington on the 24th of December, accepting the nomination and stating his platform. He now regarded the institution of domestic slavery “existing in Virginia and the other slave-holding States, morally, economically and politically right.”<sup>87</sup>

In the meantime, Summers had declined to allow his name to be used and the Whigs had nominated William L. Goggin, of Bedford, an easterner and a pro-slavery man. The campaign between the two parties followed the same lines as the canvass for the Democratic nomination, with additional rivalry of the west against the east. The Wise Democrats and the *Richmond*

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<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, September 2, 1858.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, September 10, 1858; October 4, 1858.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, October 19, 1858.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, November 5, 1858; November 30, 1858.

<sup>86</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 7, 1858.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, January 4, 1859.



*Enquirer* gave Letcher but little support. All the charges of free-soilism and anti-slavery used the fall before in the Democratic papers, were reprinted in the Whig papers, and the campaign became one of the bitterest in the history of the State. Letcher steadily disclaimed all anti-slavery sentiments and both men ran on a pro-slavery platform.<sup>88</sup>

The final vote in May showed an almost strictly east and west division in the State, Letcher being elected by a majority of a little over 5,000 votes. It is probable, therefore, that he really owed his final election to his previous anti-slavery utterances,<sup>89</sup> although his party and he were vehement in their protestations against such.

Letcher took the oath of the office as governor on January 1, 1860.<sup>90</sup> Virginia was standing on the threshold of the most momentous epoch in her history. The nation was beginning to shake with the mightiness of the question of negro slavery. Virginia herself was broken by political and sectional differences. The eastern section was conservative and unanimously bound to the support of the existing institutions. The radical northwest was controlled by men bitterly opposed to that peculiar institution, slavery, and devoted to the Federal Union. The near approach of a presidential election whose advent was fraught with evil prospects was watched with anxiety by the southern leaders. Under the leadership of South Carolina the States of the section were in an uproar. In Virginia, the wounds of the gubernatorial campaign were deep and hard to heal; every outlook in the Old Dominion was dark. No other governor had ever thus entered a term as her chief executive. Letcher was a man of strong convictions, a self-made man, of sturdy stock. He had stored in his remarkable memory, every detail necessary to the efficient performance of his duties.<sup>91</sup> The right of Virginia to do whatever she might vote to do, was the basis of all his political creed. Next to Virginia, he loved the Union, and was determined to save it, if possible. He was fearless personally and a tireless

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<sup>88</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, daily until May 27, 1859.

<sup>89</sup>Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 324.

<sup>90</sup>*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 3, 1860.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, January 3, 1860.







worker. He went to his office at eight o'clock each morning, smoked a bit, and then worked steadily until three.<sup>92</sup>

About a week after his inauguration, he sent his first message to the Legislature.<sup>93</sup> In it he stated the condition of affairs in the North and the South, and stated as his belief, that the only means of averting trouble was to call a Convention of the States, which could either reach some agreement as to slavery or effect a peaceful separation. He urged the Legislature to take steps to call such a convention. "This controversy has now reached a point," said he, "which demands a speedy settlement, if the Union is to be saved from dissolution. If the aggressions to which we have been subjected for so many years are to be repeated; if mutual distrust and suspicion are to continue, and if the election of a Republican candidate to the presidency in 1860 is to be superadded, it is useless to attempt to conceal the fact that, in the present temper of the southern people, it cannot and will not be submitted to." Most earnestly he urged a Convention of the States. He also urged, at the same time, that certain improvements be made in the State militia laws, in order that everything might be prepared, "upon the shortest notice, to protect the honor, defend the rights, and maintain the institutions (of the State) against all assaults of her enemies." Clearly had he sized up the situation and, more clearly than he thought probable, the future.

The message commanded attention all over the country, for its tone and its recommendations.<sup>94</sup> The Legislature at once set to work to arm the State in accordance with Letcher's suggestion.<sup>95</sup> The South was at this time making preparations for a Southern Convention to be held at Atlanta in the event of the election of a "Black Republican" president.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Quoted from *Richmond Whig* by Mr. Shields, of Lexington, in his Memorial Day speech, 1908.

<sup>93</sup>*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 9, 1860.

<sup>94</sup>*New York Tribune*, reprinted in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 7, 1860.

*New York Express*, reprinted in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 7, 1850.

*Charleston Mercury*, reprinted in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 14, 1860.

<sup>95</sup>*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, for January, 1860.



The National Democratic Convention met at Charleston, S. C., in April and its meeting was the scene of the most complete confusion.<sup>96</sup> Out of the confusion came two tickets as antagonistic to each other as to the one of the party at the North, headed by Abraham Lincoln. The national election was carried by the Republicans on a strict sectional vote, and on the 15th of November, Governor Letcher issued a call for the General Assembly to meet in extra session on January 7, 1861.<sup>97</sup>

In Virginia, a sentiment was growing in favor of a State Constitutional Convention to determine the course to be pursued.<sup>98</sup> When the Legislature met, Letcher sent to it a long and carefully prepared message.<sup>99</sup> He first called its members to stand firm and to do what they considered their duty. He reviewed the history of the nation from its origin and added—"Surely no people have been blessed as we have been, and it is melancholy to think that all is now about to be sacrificed upon the altar of passion. If the judgments of men were consulted, if the admonitions of our consciences were respected, the Union would yet be saved from overthrow." Again he called attention to the plan of a Convention of the States, as suggested in his inaugural message, and he urged this most earnestly, in order that if no agreement could be reached the separation might be peaceful. He resented some references by South Carolina and Mississippi of a derogatory character toward Virginia, adding "I will resist the *coercion* of Virginia into the adoption of a line of policy whenever the attempt is made, by northern or southern States."

He attributed the crisis to the non-slaveholding States; "and if the Union shall be destroyed, upon them will rest the solemn responsibility." The call for a State Convention in Virginia, although popular at the time, he unhesitatingly opposed, seeing no necessity for the move nor any good to be accomplished by it. The Conventions in 1829 and in 1850 had successfully handled all matters before the State. He again urged, as in his first message, that commissioners be sent to all of the States, except those of New England; to the North, to insist upon the uncon-

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<sup>96</sup>*Richmond Daily Dispatch*, April 25-27, 1860; May 3-4, 1860.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, November 16, 1860.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, December 14, 1860.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, January 8-9, 1861.



ditional repeal of all laws obstructing the execution of the Fugitive Slave Act; and to the South for the purpose of reconciliation. He suggested various means of reaching a satisfactory agreement, and then passed on to general principles. He said "I have always revered the State rights doctrines of Virginia inculcated in the resolution of '98 and the report of '99. I believe the doctrines therein asserted, and the principles therein affirmed, to be worthy of all acception. I cordially endorse them, and in so doing, endorse the doctrine of secession. \* \* \* I refer to it in this connection to declare my unqualified hostility to the doctrine of coercion by the Federal Government. I will regard an attempt to send Federal troops across the territory of Virginia, for the purpose of coercing a Southern seceding State as an act of invasion, which should be met and repelled. The allegiance of every citizen of Virginia is due to her; and when her flag is unfurled, it is his duty to rally to its support and defence. The citizens of Virginia who will not respond to her call is a traitor to her rights and to her honor."

He then outlined as his solution of the situation that the New England States and western New York be sloughed off and the rest of the States formed into a Confederacy, which he believed would work peacefully and powerfully. The plan would be but the consummation of the plan attempted by those States at the Hartford Convention after the War of 1812-14. He denounced the New England States most bitterly!

Having thus stated, as chief executive, his views, he left the rest in the hands of the Legislature, pleading for patriotism and decisive judgment. He closed—"In conclusion, I have but to add that the will of Virginia will furnish an inflexible rule for the direction of my own will. My destiny is indissolubly linked with hers. In the expressive language of Ruth, 'Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God.' "

The rest of the long message was technical, showing accurately the condition of the State, urging legislation here and there for its better equipment for a critical struggle. He submitted minute details and tables of statistics in the various departments, especially in the line of his greatest interest, finances.







This was the stand of Virginia's governor at the beginning of the great contest, clearly and unequivocally stated. In spite of his opposition, however, a bill authorizing the call of a state convention passed the Assembly on January 13th.<sup>100</sup> In accordance with his suggestion, another bill was passed, unanimously, to invite all the States to join in a Peace Conference at Washington on February 4th in an effort to settle the issue between the States in the interests of the whole nation. Virginia elected as her representatives her most distinguished sons, Ex-President Tyler, Wm. C. Rives, Judge John W. Brockenbrough, James A. Seddon and George W. Summers.<sup>101</sup> The conference met, with twenty-one States represented.<sup>102</sup> John Tyler was elected president and for two months Virginia labored in vain to bring the warring factions to an agreement, but the conference adjourned on April 29th, having accomplished practically nothing.<sup>103</sup> Thus Letcher's plan failed.

In the meantime, a State Convention had been elected in Virginia and met in Richmond on February 13, 1861.<sup>104</sup> Rumbblings of approaching war were beginning to be heard. Secession was the slogan all over the South, and the North began to prepare her arms.<sup>105</sup> News of the firing on Fort Sumter followed,<sup>106</sup> and Virginians began to prepare to enlist in the Southern army which was to march to meet the invaders. The people began to get restless over the long and wordy deliberations of their convention.<sup>106</sup> Action was called for. The whole State was in great excitement.

Through it all, John Letcher remained unmoved. When the news of the surrender of Fort Sumter reached Richmond, a great torch-light procession was formed, which proceeded to serenade the Executive Mansion. Letcher appeared and addressed them somewhat as follows:—"I thank you very kindly for this compliment. But I must be permitted to say that I see no reason for this demonstration. I have done all that my duty requires. I

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<sup>100</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, January 14-15, 1861.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, January 17, 1861.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, February 9, 1861.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, February 16-18, 1861; May 3, 1861.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, February 14, 1861.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, January 28, 1861; April 11, 1861.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, April 13, 1861.



can only assure you that come what may, I will be true to my duty to Virginia, with no regard to the consequences that may affect me personally." The crowd raised a Southern flag over the State capitol; Letcher sent a detachment of militia and had it taken down.<sup>107</sup>

But on April 17th, the governor received Lincoln's call, issued April 14th, for three regiments of 780 men each as Virginia's quota of his call for 70,000 troops.<sup>108</sup> And on that day John Letcher, as executive of the Commonwealth of Virginia, spoke, in all the dignity and calmness becoming the Old Dominion. He advocated moderation until it had ceased to be longer a virtue. He had used every means at his command to avert the war he saw coming. Now the honor of Virginia was at stake and such policies were forced aside. He answered the letter of Secretary of War Cameron at once:—"Sir:—I received your telegram of the 15th, the genuineness of which I doubted. Since that time, I have received your communication, mailed the same day, in which I am requested to detach from the militia of the State of Virginia the quota designated in a table, which you append, to serve as infantry or riflemen for the period of three months unless sooner discharged. In reply to this communication I have only to say that the militia of Virginia will not be furnished to the powers at Washington for any such use or purpose as they have in view. Your object is to subjugate the Southern States, and a requisition made upon me for such an object—an object in my judgment not within the purview of the Constitution or the Act of 1795—will not be complied with. You have chosen to inaugurate civil war, and having done so, we will meet it in a spirit as determined as the administration has exhibited toward the South."

He then addressed himself to the people of his State. It was a time of sore distress with him, who loved the Union, but it was a time for decisive action, and he wasted no words in the directness of proclamation. He wrote:—"Whereas, seven of the States formerly composing part of the United States have, by authority of their people, solemnly resumed the powers granted by them

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<sup>107</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, April 16, 1861.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, April 18, 1861.



to the United States, and have framed a Constitution and organized a government for themselves, to which the people of those States are yielding willing obedience and have so notified the President of the United States by all the formalities incident to such action, and thereby become to the United States a separate, independent and foreign power. And whereas, the Constitution of the United States has invested Congress with the sole power to declare war, and until such declaration is made, the President has no authority to call for extraordinary force to wage offensive war against any foreign power; and whereas, on the 15th instant, the President of the United States in plain violation of the Constitution, has issued a proclamation calling for a force of 75,000 men, to cause the laws of the United States to be duly executed over a people who are no longer a part of the Union, and in said proclamation threatens to exert this unusual force to compel obedience to his mandates; and whereas, the General Assembly of Virginia, by a majority approaching to entire unanimity, has declared at its last session that the State of Virginia would consider such an exertion of force as a virtual declaration of war, to be resisted by all the power at the command of Virginia, and subsequently, the Convention now in session, representing the sovereignty of this State, has reaffirmed in substance the same policy, by almost equal unanimity; and whereas, the State of Virginia deeply sympathizes with the Southern States, in the wrongs they have suffered, and in the position they have assumed; and having made earnest efforts peaceably to compose the differences which have severed the Union, have failed in that attempt by this unwarranted act of the President; and it is believed that the influences which operate to produce this proclamation against the seceded States will be brought to bear upon this Commonwealth, if she should exercise her undoubted right to resume the powers granted by her people; and it is due to the honor of Virginia, that an improper exercise of force against people should be repelled; Therefore, I, John Fletcher, Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, have thought proper to order all armed volunteer regiments or companies within this State to hold themselves in readiness for immediate orders and upon the reception of this proclamation to report to the Adjutant General







of the State their organization and numbers, and to prepare for efficient service.—Such companies as are not armed and equipped will report that fact, that they may be properly supplied.”

His words were greeted with a shout all over the State. As the *Richmond Enquirer* exclaimed “With calm dignity and determined purpose the Executive of Virginia has spoken and from the Atlantic to the Ohio every citizen of the State is prepared to sustain him. The blood of the conflict rests upon Abraham Lincoln and his Cabinet!” On that same day, the Convention passed the Ordinance of Secession. Letcher at once appointed an Advisory Council to himself to aid in the direction of affairs. These men were Judge J. J. Allen, of the Court of Appeals, Col. F. H. Smith, of the Virginia Military Institute, and Lieut. M. F. Maury, late of the United States Navy.<sup>109</sup>

On April 22d, Col. Robert E. Lee received his commission as Major General in the Confederate Army and on the same day Letcher called the troops out in a brief proclamation. Such was the confusion in the State that in a few days he was called upon to issue a proclamation urging the people not in military service to go back to their usual occupations, so as not to hinder the industrial workings of the State.<sup>110</sup> 75,000 men had responded to Letcher’s first call for troops,<sup>111</sup> but on May 3d, because of the evident congregation of large forces in the North, he called for still more volunteers.<sup>112</sup>

On the 23d the people of the State by an almost unanimous vote, ratified the Ordinance of Secession,<sup>113</sup> and from then until the middle of June, when the Constitution of the Confederate States was declared to be in force in Virginia,<sup>114</sup> John Letcher was the Chief Executive of a free and independent State, the Commonwealth of Virginia. In the meantime, on May 27th, the Federal troops crossed the Potomac<sup>115</sup> and the War Between the States was on in earnest.

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<sup>109</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, April 23, 1861.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, April 27, 1861.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, April 22, 1861.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, May 7, 1861.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, May 23, 1861.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, June 18, 1861.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, May 28, 1861.



It is not the purpose of this paper to give the history of the war, its battles, and its heroes. Our sketch deals with the man who labored behind the scenes, unnoticed, working day and night to supply the armies of the State, to keep in motion the everyday workings of the State machinery, keeping the people united, the industries in operation and providing for the finances that must keep the heroes in the field. His light was swallowed up in the glory of those who fought, and won or lost, the battles. This work was the lot of John Letcher and he gave himself unreservedly to the task.

Early in the war, he called Thomas J. Jackson from his chair at V. M. I. and gave him a commission as colonel in the army.

On May 30th, President Davis and the entire Confederate Government moved to Richmond and were welcomed by the Governor. In a couple of days Letcher called for organized troops to move to the scene of action to repel the advancing invaders;<sup>116</sup> and in his message he admonished the people to be calm and ready to defend the honor of Virginia.

In the northwest section of the State there was growing during this time a decided Union sentiment. The vote in that section had been almost unanimous against secession, and the Union sentiment continued to develop under the leadership of John S. Carlile and F. H. Pierpont.<sup>117</sup> To these people Letcher addressed, on the 14th of June, an appeal,<sup>118</sup> pleading with them not to turn traitors to their native State in this time of her trial. The majority of the people of the State had voted for secession and it was the duty of the others to obey. He realized that there were traitors in their midst and that they had great influence. Eloquently he addressed them: "Men of the Northwest, I appeal to you, by all the considerations which have drawn us together as one people heretofore, to rally to the standard of the Old Dominion. By all the sacred ties of consanguinity, by the intermixture of the blood of the East and the West, by common paternity, by friendship hallowed by a thousand cherished recollections, by memories of the past, by the relics of the great

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<sup>116</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, June 4, 1861.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, July 2, 1861.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, July 18, 1861.



men of other days, come to Virginia's banner and drive the invaders from your soil. There may be traitors in the midst of you, who for selfish ends have turned against their mother and would permit her to be ignominiously oppressed and degraded. But I cannot, will not believe that a majority of you are not true sons, who will give your blood and your treasure for Virginia's defense. Let one heart, one mind, one energy, one power, nerve every patriot arm in a common cause. The heart that will not beat in unison for Virginia now is a traitor's heart; the arm that will not strike home in her cause now is palsied by a coward fear."

In July, he left Richmond and went into the northwest to try to aid by his personal presence the cause of the South,<sup>119</sup> but returned in a few days unable to accomplish anything.<sup>120</sup> And the State was later dismembered, that section first being treated as conquered territory by the United States,<sup>121</sup> and then having a separate government set up at Wheeling.

On the 15th of July, Letcher called out all the militia east of the Blue Ridge and north of the James River,<sup>122</sup> but after the Battle of Manassas—on July 18th—he modified that call.<sup>123</sup>

In August, looking ahead at the coming winter, Letcher began to lay plans for the clothing of Virginia's soldiers and issued an urgent message to the people on the subject.<sup>124</sup> Results in this work were rapid, and he labored earnestly to keep up the supplies.

In January he sent to the General Assembly the most elaborate message he had as yet produced.<sup>125</sup> He reviewed in detail Virginia's secession, her delay at first and her immediate action after Lincoln's call for troops. He then went into the provisions of the Constitution of the United States which had been violated by the action of the Administration at Washington, including the suspension of *habeas corpus*, the declaration of martial law without constitutional warrant, and the effort to divide a State

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<sup>119</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, July 10, 1861.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, July 16, 1861.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, August 4, 1861.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, July 15, 1861.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, July 20, 1861.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, August 23, 1861.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, January 8, 1862.







into two States without the consent of the original State; and he declared that Virginia could never accept anything but the unqualified recognition of the Confederate States of America. His recommendations to the Legislature at this time were largely along general instead of specific lines.

About the middle of February, he declared martial law to be in effect, requiring all men between 18 and 35 years old to enlist.<sup>126</sup> On May 6th he called the Legislature into extra session, as the arms of the State were meeting with some reverses, and to them he addressed a very encouraging message,<sup>127</sup> showing how the war was progressing along the same lines as the American Revolution, and that therefore there was no cause for alarm or discouragement. He urged, in the most vigorous language, an aggressive war policy. He wanted the Southern Army to do the invading. He took a very practical view of this, showing that Virginia was not able to sustain both armies; and that an invasion of the North would throw much of the burden upon that section and give Virginia a chance to recover herself. He recommended laws for the removal of slaves from invaded territory, so as to retain their labor as well as the property represented therein; also laws providing for the working of lead, salt-petre and sulphur mines, for the manufacture of gunpowder. He urged laws for regulating the speed of railway trains, in order to lessen the damage done them by a high rate of speed, as Virginia had no means of replacing such machinery; and also urged more stringent laws in regard to exemption from military service. He added a detailed report on finances, and closed with a defense of the western people as crushed but loyal. This message was pronounced a most wise and practical view of conditions and the enactment of its recommendations was at once entered upon by the Legislature.

In June came another most eloquent proclamation calling for more volunteers.<sup>128</sup> About this time a most serious question was arising, the lack of a sufficient supply of salt, the mines in the Kanawha valley being in the hands of the Federals. Letcher

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<sup>126</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, February 14, 1862.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, May 7, 1862.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, June 28, 1862.



went to the fields of Washington and Amelia counties and carefully investigated the situation and then called an extra session of the Legislature to regulate the output.<sup>130</sup> He was eminently successful and no further fear was felt in that direction by the Confederacy. To that Assembly Letcher persistently urged the adoption of an *aggressive* war policy, as the only means of reaching a successful termination to hostilities.<sup>129</sup>

In January, 1863, Letcher took up with Lincoln the matter of the treatment of Confederate prisoners. Three Confederate officers had been imprisoned as felons by the United States. Letcher promptly put into solitary confinement in the State penitentiary nine "Yankee prisoners," and then wrote Lincoln a long letter asking that some arrangement be made for the exchange of prisoners, adding, "If no such agreement be made and the course hitherto pursued be continued, I shall without hesitation, so long as the honor of Virginia and the safety and welfare of her citizens are entrusted to me as her Chief Magistrate, unflinchingly retaliate to the utmost of my ability and power for any improper, unusual or harsh treatment practised upon officers, soldiers or citizens of Virginia. The sin of its commencement shall rest upon the government of the United States. The virtue of its continuance shall be proudly upheld by the authorities of this Commonwealth."<sup>131</sup> To this letter, he received no reply.

On September 7th, the General Assembly again met in extra session in response to Letcher's call.<sup>132</sup> In his message to them the first difficulty he presented for their consideration was the fact that the supply of men for the Army was fast being exhausted and more were needed for purposes of local defense. He asked for the passage of a law organizing all men between sixteen and sixty years of age, foreigners residing in the State included. He recommended the repeal of most of the exemption clauses of the military law. He called on the people of the State not to be discouraged, and he urged, in a most able way, the Legislature not to act in a way to impair the confidence of the

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<sup>129</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, September 17, 1862.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, September 6, 1862; September 17, 1862.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, February 9, 1863.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, September 8, 1863.



people in the currency of the Confederate Government. He closed that message with one of the most eloquent passages he ever wrote, a eulogy to his fellow-townsmen, General Stonewall Jackson. His recommendations in regard to the militia were passed and as promptly put into execution, and numbers of troops were formed for the defense of the State during the stay of the Army of Pennsylvania.<sup>133</sup>

On December 18th, he addressed his last message to the Legislature,<sup>134</sup> urging especially more stringent naturalization laws, to cut off the advent of Yankee representatives being sent into the State by the Federal government to arouse the slave population. Bitterly did Letcher denounce such action. He was able to say to the Assembly that the finances of the State were in good condition in spite of the terrific strain upon that department.

The last passage of this message was eminently characteristic of the man. Jealous as a lover of Virginia's welfare, nothing turned his head from the line of her best interests. He wrote:—"A bill extending certain privileges to the Confederate Government to the free simple use of our iron, lead and coal mines, passed the House of Delegates at the last session; and I desire, as one of the last acts of my administration, to place on record my opinion as to the impolicy of such legislation. Much of our present trouble at this moment grows out of our cession of territory to the Federal Government, for forts, arsenals, etc. I am utterly opposed to such entangling alliances in the future, and I trust that the General Assembly will learn wisdom from the past and will therefore hold the territory of the State and especially her mineral resources, under her exclusive control. It is the part of wisdom to guard against such embarrassments, and so to legislate as to protect the State in every possible contingency. In times like these we know not what a day may bring forth, and we should avoid everything that may be calculated to embarrass us in the future. If such legislation be consummated, I fear the time will come when we shall regret it."

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<sup>133</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, October 1, 1863.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, December 21, 1863.







On December 31, 1863, John Letcher retired from the Executive Mansion and his successor, the Honorable William Smith, was inaugurated on the next day.<sup>135</sup> Letcher had been put forward in the spring as a candidate for the Confederate Congress from his home district, but did not succeed in defeating the incumbent in the position,<sup>136</sup> and therefore, broken in mind and spirit, he retired into private life to his home in Lexington.

Soon after his arrival there his house and all his belongings were burned by a detachment of Federal troops, and he, his family and his servants were turned out into the streets. About a month after the war closed he was arrested under orders from Washington and conveyed to that city, where he was imprisoned in the old Capitol building for about two months. While there he was indicted for treason by the grand jury at Norfolk, Virginia (the same jury which returned like indictments against Davis, Lee and others), but was later released and returned to his family. It is thought that he was never pardoned by the President, and was under orders not to leave the country for the rest of his life.

He lived in Lexington, crushed by the disgraces heaped upon his beloved Virginia until 1875. During that time Virginia was recovering her strength and in that year she called back her loyal sons to the Halls of her Legislature to reconstruct her laws and her institutions. Among those who returned was John Letcher, going to the House of Delegates from Rockbridge county. During one of the first sessions of the Assembly he was stricken with paralysis. He recovered sufficiently to allow his removal to his native Lexington. Although without any income of his own of any account, he refused the offer of the General Assembly to bear the expenses of his illness, saying even then "The precedent is a dangerous one at all times, and especially so now, in the distressed condition of our people, whose lot I claim to be my lot." He lingered until January 26, 1884, when he passed away surrounded by his family.

Born of a race of leaders through an humble parentage into the State of statesman, John Letcher had directed the policy

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<sup>135</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, January 2, 1864.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, June 29, 1863.



of Virginia through the great crisis of her history. A native of the west, he was strong in mind and body with the strength of the frontier; self-educated, he was self-reliant in intellect and judgment; by profession a lawyer, he was ready with tongue and pen; by choice a politician, he kept a record unassailable in integrity, unmarked by a blot or the suspicion of a spot; an American, he loved the Federal Union with a great absorbing love; a Virginian, he devoted to her his life in its entirety, and left her as he had come, possessing naught save clean hands. He lies buried in Lexington, with Jackson and Lee.



## LETTERS.

Richmond 28 April 1861

Dear Brother,

Yours of 20th to hand in good time considering the derangement of the mails.

I am more sad about the state of affairs than I can well express. What is to become of us all & what is to be the end of all this. From what we hear of the North they seem determined to keep matters to an issue of a bloody nature & the South will be ready to meet them on any field they choose.

I have today been out to see the soldiers that are stationed near here & when I looked on them (many of whom I know) & saw the material of which they are made up, it sickened me to think that in case of a conflict so many valuable lives would be lost. You who have been accustomed to a *free* state all your life will find it hard to believe that our army will in large part be made up of the very best class of society. Our Merchants, Lawyers, Planters, Clerks, etc make up the *rank and file*. The enthusiasm here is beyond all bounds. Any and every sacrifice will be made. Our ladies are doing all they can. they are encouraging their Husbands Sons & brothers to go the uniforms are all or nearly all made by them Nearly every church in town is turned into a tailor's shop, in which you may hear the click of the shears & the buzz of the Sewing *Machine* In our church there are *five* machines sowing every day.

I omitted to say that several of our clergymen have enlisted as privates, among them Dr. Hoge, among the most distinguished of his class here. If Beecher wants to engage in the war & is willing to use carnal weopans he will in Dr. Hoge "find a foeman worthy of his steel". If common report however does not belie Beecher, he would probably rather "steal a nigger" than steal a foe. South Carolina has about one thousand troops in our city, & many more on the way. of all the resignations from the late United States army, you of course have seen notice in the News-





papers. Many of them have received appointments here. Now, what is the use of all this. this part of the country will fight as long as there is a man left, but as to being governed by the other part, or again uniting with them neither will ever be thought of, & the sooner the North believes this the better it will be for all.

Our State thinks she has done all she could do to preserve the Union. She has stuck to it as long as she could. Her Convention when it assembled in February was say four fifths Union. proposition after proposition was made, committees went to Washington, & everything that could be done was done to preserve the Union, but all to no effect. & Now when secession has been forced upon us, she is using her utmost power to maintain her new position. Why not part in peace. No good will come of a long bloody war. It will after all be settled by arbitration, why not as well do it at once. Do not count upon any slave state remaining to the Union, a political necessity links them together & together they will be in less than ninety days.

In relation to Charley I am sorry you did not decide the matter. Should the war be protracted he will run a risk of being *drafted* into the Army, & perhaps after a while, as the contest waxes warmer it will be disagreeable for him to remain here. Just now, any northern man who would express any sympathy with the North would be regarded with distrust and might be invited to leave, but if he chooses to remain here and keep quiet he will never be interfered with. I do not mention this to make you uneasy about Charley, for I believe him very prudent, in fact I think his sympathies rather incline him to the South. We shall be sorry to part with him but if you decide for him to leave, I presume there will be no difficulty in his getting through to New York safe.

In my case it is different, twenty three years residence here, a firm conviction that the position of the South is right, my wife, children, interest, all bind me here & here my destiny is to be identified with the State where the largest & I may now say the best part of my life has been spent. The war is going to be a terrible blow on us, financially we are already feeling its blighting effects on our business. We calculate upon a bright and promising future when we shall be firmly settled again. \* \* \*



Jimmy by the way is the greatest secessionist in Va. & is about as thoroughly posted up in all matters in relation to it as any one else. He would take particular pleasure in giving "Old Abe" & Genr'l Scott fitts.

As I have little space I will fill it up with a relation of a few incidents which will show you the temper of the people here. A young lady, an orphan, who has her own property in hand is at her own expense equipping an entire company with complete uniforms. From our Brokers establishment all the young men have gone & the partners three in number are members of a volunteer Co. From our house two partners all the young men save one & the Porters have already gone. the remaining porter knows nothing about the business, except the books which he attends to. So I might go on & fill up an entire sheet with similar incidents but the above will show you how they feel here.

Does the North suppose she can subjugate such a people & suppose just for the argument that she could, what would she profit by it. United they never will be. Their courses now diverge why not each go its own way. There is room enough for all & perhaps they may be better friends under separate governments

Yours,

JAMES G. CHENERY.

Richmond 18 Oct 1865.

Dear Brother,

I arrived home very safely on Sunday last & found my family all well. They as well as all who saw you here are extremely anxious for you to come & we shall look with anxiety & pleasure to the day when you will be here. As I am to see you so soon I will defer writing about all matters which we can talk about when you get here. Now about business matters. I commenced chacing up a scheme & the first thing which I found is the City Rail Road. This Rail Road was chartered about 5 years since with a charter for 15 years, to run through all our principal streets & with *the right* to extend to the *country* with the consent of the *County authorities*. The road was laid down and operated for a short time up Main Street & on Broad Street.



When the war came on our authorities took up the track to get the Iron to complete our Gun Boats & everything the R R CO had was invested in confederate securities & the consequence is that all they have now is the naked charter. Not one cent else. The traffic on the Road through our principal thoroughfares will pay a fine dividend upon the cost, & the chance to invest in lots outside the Corporation is unlimited.

The demand for houses here now is great, far beyond the supply, even if parties wanting could pay the price demanded. This of course is out of the question & cheap houses put up on property bought outside of the Corporation will be an immense speculation. I may mention here that all the streets leading to the country go out upon easy grades & that they can be extended to any desired distance. The Capital required for this enterprise will be \$200,000.

The President of the A. seems to have the Charter at his disposal & a good thing can be made of it, *I think*. Feel of your friends about this.

Another scheme is this. A friend of mine says a manufacturing establishment situated near Charlottesville, about 100 miles from Richmond immediately upon the R Road & also water communication by the Canal to R. The House has been burned and the machinery all destroyed the walls very thick are still good & they would require Floor & Roof to complete it. There are ten acres of land attached to the place, & unfailing water power. My friend thinks it can be bought for (\$10,000) ten thousand dollars. With the present profits upon the manufacture of cotton goods, this looks cheap

This plant has been run as a manufactory for many years & there will be no difficulty in getting the labor to run the Mill, as soon as it is put in readiness.

For property as well located as this, in such a magnificent country, right on a Rail Road leading in one way to Richmond in another to Alexandria & Washington & in the other to the White Sulphur Springs & ultimately to the Ohio River & in an other to Lynchburg & then on to New Orleans—by lines already completed, I think this a *good thing*.

JAMES G. CHENBRY.







## THOMAS RITCHIE TO HOWELL COBB

Richmond (Va.) Februray 8th, 1844.

Dear Sir,

Your polite, but laconic, note prompts me to address you. You cheer me with the history you give me, and as your information preceded our late glorious Convention, I am in hopes, the skies are brighter, than when you wrote me. I will thank you for any information you may be able to impart to me on this subject. I take a very deep interest in the success of the Republican candidate, and in the defeat of Mr. Clay. I consider his election is calculated to ring the knell of most of our great Republican Principles.

A reunion has taken place between the friends of Calhoun and Van Buren in Virginia. Our late State Convention has hapily brought it about. Am I too sanguine in hoping that the moral effects of our example will extend to Georgia? I received a letter from Governor McDonald, the other day, in which he says, that the Republicans are about to make a great rally in that State at the Convention they are about to hold in June or July. Is it not possible to rouse up the Republicans of Georgia immediately, and to unite them together more firmly and energetically in the way we have done? Could not you and your Colleagues address your friends there and call upon them to put forth their strength directly? I hope to see the Press of Georgia and of N. Carolina, and of Tennessee come out, without delay, trumpet-tongued.

I beg you to communicate as soon as it is convenient what is going on among our friends.

Mr. Cobb, first in the H. of R. and then in the U. S. Senate, and the perticular friend of Mr. Crawford was my correspondent from Washington to the day of his death. Are you related to that estimable man and esteemed Statesman?

The enclosed memoranda has been put into my hands, and I must ask you to assist me in answering it. My impression is that I have seen a letter from Mr. Crawford, changing his views on the Bank of the U. States. Be so good as to drop me a line



upon it, and enclose me a copy of Mr. Crawford's letter, if you have such a one at your disposition, or write me where I can obtain the information.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO HOWELL COBB.

Private

Richmond (Va.) Monday evening

(May 6, 1844.)

My Dear Sir,

I am deeply sensible of the kindness you have shown me, and the confidence you have reposed in me, by your candid and manly letter. It is worthy of the character which I have heard ascribed to you by those who personally know you.

For forty years (on Thursday next) have I been the Editor of a paper—and never have I seen the Republican Party in so much danger. We are breaking up into factions. The Great Dictator march on to power with a strong and invincible party at his heels; whilst we are divided by miserable contests and contemptible jealousies.

You ask me to interpose my good offices between the contending presses at Washington. I might as well attempt to stop the Ocean with a bullrush. The *Globe* now will hearken to no good counsels. An arrogant spirit presides over it, at the very moment that it should conciliate and bind us together. And again my able and noble friend Dromgoole, whose only fault in the world is on some occasions a dogged *tenax proposita*, is rushing before the public, instead of treating me like its real friend, and I trust in God, if not as able, at least as pure and disinterested a politician as himself, by remonstrating with me privately, as if he thought I had done wrong, and seeking by arguments to which I am never deaf, to bring me right. But, Sir, Dromgoole is groping in the dark. He does not know the sentiment of Virginia. She will demand the annexation of Texas, if it can be obtained. But he does not know the condition of things in relation to the Presidential Slate. Dromgoole and a hundred Globes cannot stop the current of public sentiment in the South. I send you confidentially a letter I received today from a Republican. He is a lawyer in Petersburg. Don't show it, but return it



to me. I recd. 5 others of a similar character yesterday, from different parts of the state.

I have this moment received the proceedins of the Democrats of this County (Henrico) assembled at the Court House. The oldest, staunchest Republicans unanimously voted for relieving W. H. Roane and his colleagues of the Baltimore Convention, form their instructions to vote for V. B. and leaving them to their *sound discretion*. You know the character of W. H. Roane (former U. S. Senator and the devoted friend of Mr. V. B.) It was he, not I, who passed the *last resolution*, which the Globe and Dromgoole attack. The meeting of Henrico to-day was about at one time, I understand, to instruct the Baltimore delegates to vote for no man who was not for Texas. As it was they expressed treir earnest desire for their Baltimore delegates to procure the nomination of a Democrat friendly to the immediate annexation of Texas.

I spoke very freely to Mr. Stiles, about what I thought was the duty of our friends in Congress, for no member, unless he be a delegate to the B. Convention, to have any thing to say of the Presidential Election and for them only to collect information about the candidates and await the public sentiment.

Do write me now and then. Inform me what is going forward.

P. S. Do cultivate the acquaintance of my friend, Gen. Bayley, the new member.

THOMAS RITCHIE TO HOWELL COBB

Richmond, May 23, 1844.

My Dear Sir,

If you had asked me to square the circle, or solve the Longitude, I should as soon have undertaken it, as to have advised you upon the problem, which you have proposed to me. If you will give us a strong available candidate, on whom our party will rely, *tu eris mihi magnus Apollo*.

As one step toward seeing your way out of the fog, I advise you to make the acquaintance of my friend, W. H. Roane, who is a delegate from this District. You will find him a man after your own heart. Tell him, if you please, that we are only





strengthened in the opinion which he entertained when he left us, that it is in vain to expect to carry Virginia with our friend Van Buren.

If we have no Texas candidate but Capt. John Tyler, he will carry off a few thousand from Mr. V. B., which *per se* would be sufficient to defeat Mr. B. V. in Virginia.

My eldest son, W. F. Ritchie, carries this hasty letter with him. He is an Alternate Delegate to the Baltimore Convention. He has seen all my correspondence and knows the public sentiment of Virginia as well as I do. He will go into the Convention and carry out the wishes of his constituents of the Abingdon District, and he goes in also as *no man's man*—not even his father's—as I have written Mr. Colquett. I pray you to make him welcome in Washington.



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